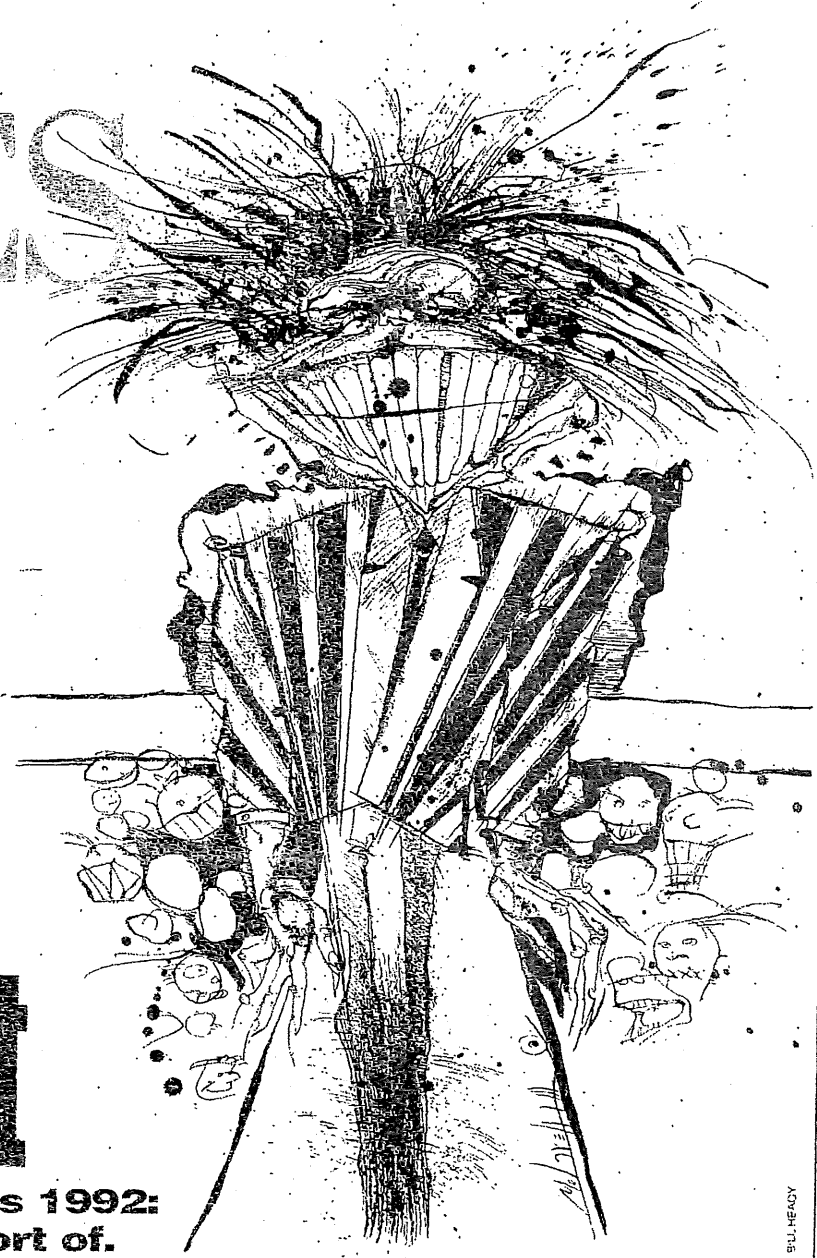


# CITY PAGES

# The \$4 Million Beauty Contest

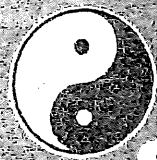
Primaries and caucuses 1992: power to the people, sort of.  
by Roger Swardson, 10



BU, HEADY

Walking the Thin Blue Line

Black cops, race hate, and the police department (Perry, 4)

 House of Shui

How's the chi at your place? (Caniglia, 21)

**Whatever Minnesota's new primary isn't, it is a big show. But the caucuses are still where the real work gets done.**

by Roger Swardson

**W**hen the powerful say they are going to give something to "the people" I try to stay awake, because I am one and I also like gifts. But when Minnesota legislators last week debated "giving the vote to the people," it was unsettling. Unless Perpich had ridden back into town and staged a Balkan-style putsch, it was my understanding that the people already had the vote.

To clear up the matter, I visited the Minnesota House chambers. The renovated decor is spectacular. It reminds you of a government. The focus of discussion was whether to override Gov. Carlson's veto of a bill to repeal Minnesota's reconstituted presidential primary. I quickly learned that "give the vote to the people" is simply the politically correct version of "give the voters an event that will look like a presidential primary with the help of the media and about \$4 million but is really our revenge against the zealots who have taken over the political parties".

Just by seriously considering a primary, the Legislature had sent a message to the parties that they were fed up with being asked one question on abortion to win party support in caucuses. You had to wonder, though, why the House debate was dragging on. The Senate had already gone big for repeal, voting to override Carlson's veto by a 56-9 margin two days earlier. The House itself had voted 103-28 for repeal in December. This time only 90 votes were required to kill the Carlson veto. But in the end, the override effort got only 77 votes.

The House may have dithered for the same reason one of the founders of this primary helped create it: Minnesotans today are goofy about promotable super-events. Attracting and staging them has become a big business. There is a fear that if we don't land the big events, the Twin Cities could become, as the saying goes, nothing but a cold Omaha.

Pat Forcica knows this. He is an idea guy, a marketing guy, and is now vice president for communications with the North Stars. In 1988 he was a political consultant for the DFL, putting in long hours for Dukakis, fighting for name recognition, exposure, support, and a win. The payoff is banner headlines on your winner the next morning. Then you win Player of the Week in a pretty tough league. So what happened in 1988?

"The night of the Minnesota caucuses, South Dakota had its primary. And because it was a primary they were all done and counted up by 8:05," Forcica recalls. "So the Gephardt win winds up leading the 10:00 news and leaves the newspapers plenty of time to write for the morning. In the meantime, Minnesota is still mucking around in the caucuses until well after midnight. Dukakis comes out on top, but by that time who the hell cares? The news was South Dakota."

Forcica is not a fan of the caucus system. It doesn't translate well to media. He has a kindred spirit in a friend from the Iron Range, state Sen. Ron Dicklich (DFL-Hibbing). "You have to understand that up here we like to



BILL HEAGY

**These days, the caucus system is supposed to be in trouble. "It used to be you hung together to beat the other side," observes one longtime participant. "Now many of the most vicious fights are within your own bunch. What the hell kind of thing is that?"**

vote. We turn out. And we don't like people telling us what to do," Dicklich says. "And you also have to figure that people were getting really tired of party people gaveling them down and letting wackos take up hours on end with narrow issues leaving no time for big problems like unemployment. So that's what led to the primary idea."

So when Dicklich's presidential primary bill hit the Senate in the fall of 1989, it carried two pretty appealing messages: Here was another event to put Minnesota on the national media map, and a way to jab the party organizations by taking a choice piece of business out of the caucuses. The Legislature loved it, especially since the idea was to make

the counties and municipalities pick up most of the tab for staging it. The Senate went 48-16 and the House 117-10 without committee hearings or debate. There were a few problems, but they would be fixed over the winter and a revision could be approved in the spring.

There would be two "fixes." The national

# The Rough Art of Politics

political parties demanded that the date be pushed back. The Dicklich bill had the primary set for the fourth Tuesday in February, which would make it the second primary after New Hampshire and the same day as South Dakota. The national parties were not amused. The date was finally set at April 7, very late in the game and the same day as New York. As for Forcica, once again he gets to read South Dakota in the nation's headlines while Minnesota will make a splash like the one the U.S. made in winning the bronze last week in demonstration curling.

The second change came from heavy party pressure to require voters to declare themselves for either party in order to receive that party's ballot. Parties have never figured out how to stop independents, crossover, and malcontents within their own party from doing what they damn well please and screwing up the orderliness of a primary election. (In 1952 Republican regulars intended to see Harold Stassen nominated as a favorite son. Instead, voters wrote in Dwight Eisenhower. And in 1956, DFL heavies as much as promised Adlai Stevenson the state. The rank-and-file voted for Estes Kefauver, and the leadership screamed about Edina crossovers. With Hubert Humphrey preparing to go up against John Kennedy in the 1960 preliminaries, the idea of risking the embarrassment of another home-boy was intolerable. The Legislature dutifully killed the primary 81-47.)

Even with the changes, the revised 1990 bill sailed through both chambers early in the session; with only one dissenting vote in the House. Then the ground shifted. Opposition came from all corners of the state as the estimated costs to the counties and municipalities were added up: \$3 to \$5 million for already hard-pressed local government. Opponents kept hammering away, and when Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville) introduced a bill to repeal last December, the Legislature happily jumped to the other extreme, with the House voting 103-28 to kill the bill they had passed nearly unanimously. Was the primary dead? No. Carlson then vetoed the repeal on the last day of the December session. Searching for a reason, some said he liked the idea of computer printouts of Republican primary voters.

When the Legislature reconvened last Tuesday, Marty introduced a bill to override Carlson's veto, and the Senate wasted no time passing it. Its anticlimactic death in the House two days later confirmed what Pat Forcica had believed in all along: the power of hype. Because as the Senate was voting, so was New Hampshire. And on Tuesday night and all day Wednesday, Minnesotans caught the drama of New Hampshire along with the news that the Minnesota Senate had just moved to deprive them of a primary.

On Thursday morning, both dailies carried editorials scolding the Senate. Suddenly the bill that had been around for two years and was about to go back on the shelf because it needed more work became an incredibly hot public potato. As the House met, Rep. Harold Lasley (DFL-Cambridge), who would submit the measure for override, estimated that what had been considered somewhat routine was now three votes either way of the

required 90. Then the speeches started. Rep. Paul Ogren (DFL-Aitkin) boomed: "Democracy is breaking out all over the world and all over the country and here we are in Minnesota removing the right to vote." In the end, 26 members reversed themselves, some before our very eyes, and the Minnesota presidential primary was hauled up the flagpole.

The primary battle leaves a larger question hanging. What is the role of "the people" in the presidential nomination process during a year of hard times and bleak prospects? After all, there is a system—much maligned and abused—that provides a framework for coming together and taking on the issues. It is often baffling and bizarre. But it remains the basic unit of party politics: the caucus.

Bob Weinholzer, state Republican co-chair, was worried about the U.S. losing control of the Panama Canal. Ron Dicklich, a DFL state senator from Hibbing, went because a friend of the family named Perpich needed a hand. People go to their first precinct caucuses for all kinds of reasons. Jack Kennedy inspired them. The recession angers them. Or they're haunted by abortion, or they stoutly believe in the electric chair or Harold Stassen.

These days the caucus system is supposed to be in trouble. To some, caucuses have become territorial trophies for single-issue zealots. Others say single issues have always held sway, and the only difference is that the focus has changed from labor's agenda, civil rights, and Vietnam to gay and lesbian rights and feminist issues—leaving the straight, white males who often dominate the political mechanism feeling adrift and frustrated. Some see the caucuses as protective little clubs that beg for newcomers and then stifle them. Still others point to a lack of leadership, often meaning they miss the Humphrey days, the days when you could talk to Gene McCarthy at



State Sen. John Marty



State Sen. Ron Dicklich

the Lexington now and then, and people weren't embarrassed to sing songs like "Happy Days Are Here Again."

One of the casualties of a decade of decline in the viability of the caucus system is that there are fewer people participating, and even fewer who remember the halcyon days of caucus politics when battles were fought throughout the night and afterward participants on all sides were expected to mend fences and pull for the common cause. As one longtime participant recently observed: "It's different now. There's a narrowness, and resentments stay around poisoning things. It used to be you hung together to beat the other side. Now many of the most vicious fights are within your own bunch. What the hell kind of thing is that?"

## The Insider

Peter Popovich is thinking about going to his precinct caucus for the first time since the early 1980s. Since mandatory retirement from the State Court of Appeals bench at age 70, he is again permitted to participate in the caucuses.

In 1948 Popovich supported a young professor from St. Thomas named Gene McCarthy who wanted to run for the U.S. House. In 1956 he opposed McCarthy when the core of the party powerful were pushing Adlai Stevenson. Party stalwarts Popovich, D.D. Wozniak, Bob Short, and Coya Knutson got behind Estes Kefauver in the presidential primary and won.

"The thing is we all stayed friends," he says now. That's his first piece of advice to anybody going to caucus. Stay friends. And he has some other street advice. "When you walk in, take care of the practicalities. Look around. See who's there. Talk to people you are comfortable with. See how the crowd is

Caucuses to page 12

**The House may have choked on repealing the primary for the same reason one of its founders helped create it: Minnesotans today are goofy about promotable super-events. Attracting and staging them has become big business.**

**Caucuses from page 11**  
 going to divide up. And be a little patient. There're going to be some long-winded types. And unless you can't help it, be careful about single issues or people who want to monopolize the process. It's the surest way I know to become bitter and walk away yourself or drive other people away. Politics cannot be exclusionary. Politics is numbers. If you're lucky you'll find somebody who can make sense out of the process for you. Make it exciting. You'll remember them years later like a favorite teacher. Hubert Humphrey was a person like that.

"Remember it's not especially orderly. But given all the problems there are today, if you go to an orderly caucus there's something terribly wrong there."

**The Outsider**

**D**riving home one night in 1967 after a Fridley City Council meeting, John Wright was troubled. A councilman, he had shouted down a resident by saying, "You don't know what this city needs!"

"Even as I shouted," he recalls, "I was thinking, 'My God, the only reason you are defending the status quo is because you have become a part of it.'"

The lesson is the difference between being on the inside or the outside of politics and governance. John Wright has seen it both ways. Now a faculty member at the University of Kansas, in 1968 Wright co-chaired the Concerned Democrats, a confederation of anti-Vietnam groups that would sweep neighborhood caucuses across the Twin Cities and then go on to take the Second, Third, and Fourth Congressional Districts for Gene McCarthy before moving on to Chicago for the most tumultuous political convention in the country's history.

It was a night of stunning political activity: the organizations of two of Minnesota's political leaders battling in every neighbor-

hood, every township, for every delegate. And there was only one issue: The War. "As the results came in it was just astounding," recalls Wright. "It illustrates what a major issue can do to get participation in the caucuses. It was an organized attempt to seize power, a hostile takeover." In some cases, quite literally.

• In 45B just below the Cathedral in St. Paul, a 23-year-old high school social studies teacher named Steve Katainen became impatient with what he saw as an attempt by the chairman to gavel down the opposition. He tried to take the microphone and the chairman knocked him over a couple of rows of chairs. Later, as he was being taken to Ramsey Hospital, it was he who was elected chair.

• In Edina Bob Short, who had helped lead the Kefauver revolt in 1956 and later ran for lieutenant governor, was denied a delegate's seat. So were four members of Hubert Humphrey's family in Burnsville. D.D. Wozniak, another Kefauver backer and on this night a Humphrey supporter, didn't make it. Nor did St. Paul Mayor Tom Byrne or Secretary of State Joe Donovan, who said, "Never before in the history of politics have I seen this happen."

• In the 11th precinct of the 12th Ward in Minneapolis, a 21-year-old junior at the University of Minnesota found himself in opposition to the incumbent chair, who was also his mother. He defeated her.

• In Minneapolis's Sixth Ward, a 25-year-old law student named Vaneq Opperman engineered a near-sweep, taking 19 of 20 precincts from downtown to Franklin Avenue. Opperman was later elected Hennepin County party chairman.

A man who attended a caucus in Minnetonka said, "It was a show of raw political power. No courtesy, no generosity, no recognition of the regulars' long, hard work in the past." It was a night that would haunt the DFL long afterward.

The implacable resolve of the newcomers, fueled by an outpouring of anger about the war, changed the style of caucuses to come—when other issues would be advanced and other newcomers organized. And a device that found wide use that night—the sub-caucus—would become the instrument of new bands of single-issue adherents. What the sub-caucus provided was a way for those who believe in a single issue or in the interests of a specific group to attach a label to any candidate as a condition of support. For example, in a DFL caucus there might be a Harkin/Pro-Choice sub-caucus and a Harkin/Pro-Life sub-caucus as well as Kerrey sub-caucuses split the same way. In that sense the underlying interests of the caucus attendees remain rigid.

Which explains how political conventions can meet and not endorse candidates. Another way to use the device is to not declare for anything or anybody. In Maine last week, the uncommitted delegates came in third, ahead of Clinton. Today the sub-caucus is a favorite device, but one that is also given credit for fragmenting the process to a point where little beyond participation is accomplished.

In an effort to try to keep the Independent-Republican caucuses from fragmenting to bits, state co-chair Bob Weinholzer says the recommendation in the Independent-Republican organization is that each sub-caucus be given a maximum of 10 minutes of floor time.

But the heart of the caucus is not order. It is the expression of political viewpoint. It is an important way to speak directly to the political system. John Wright remembers it as life-changing in a way that working within the system, becoming a part of the status quo, never was. "Even if you only go to caucuses once in your life," he says, "I think it is vital."

Caucuses to page 14

**Teamsters lobbyist Jack Mogelson remembers how civil rights and war galvanized caucuses in 1968. "Today we're not hooked up that way. We have sanitized wars and budget shortfalls and downsizing. No human being hurting there, right?"**

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NEXT WEEK IN CITY PAGES...

**C**ulture To Go.

Caucuses from page 12

**The Organizer**

**P**olitics, like it or not, is organization. Twenty-five people will appear on the ballots in the presidential primary April 7. Twenty-four of them paid their \$500 fee to get on the ballot. Only one got there the other way, with a petition containing 2,000 names. That was Tom Harkin. He got them primarily from volunteers going to the union locals. If you listen to Harkin closely you can see why. He talks along traditional Democratic lines. Jack Mogelson is president of DRIVE, the Teamsters' political-action arm. "There is a

voice raised among our members, a need to express the concerns facing working people. Basic issues are not being dealt with. Yes, we will be at the caucuses and we believe that Harkin's message about jobs is a powerful one."

But Mogelson also supports the primary. "The primary is a way to involve large numbers of people. Even if all the kinks aren't worked out this first time around, it will provide a snapshot of how people feel. It's an initial step."

According to Mogelson, it's not as easy to get a clear message across today as it was in years past. "One of the things that created so much anger in 1968 was that, the issues were clearer and more immediate. Every day on television or in our lives, something happened that drove home the issue of the war and of civil rights. People were hurting right in front of us."

"We're not hooked up that way today. We have sanitized wars and budget shortfalls and downsizing. No human being hurting there, right? Just abstraction."

"And on the political level everybody's got to pass the litmus test of all the sub-caucuses which tend to be ways to reject, ways to find somebody not perfect. Same with the media's focus on lifestyle. Again, it's how can we reject this person. We suffer from a tremendous fragmentation. And the empowerment of one group inevitably encroaches on the aspirations of another group. And we get after each other rather than attack the basic issues."

"Well, I can tell you I think labor is going to get back into the arena this year. We have to. Too many issues are reaching the flash-point. Too many people are hurting."

**The Heart of the Matter**

**T**here is a long, colorful history of political activism in Minnesota, and Nellie Stone Johnson has seen a great deal of it. When she was a young woman, her

father drove vegetables from their Pine City farm to the striking Teamsters in the market district of downtown Minneapolis in 1934. The vegetables were free as long as the Teamsters had the cash for gas, which Nellie's family lacked. In 1944, she walked arm in arm with the other members of the Non-Partisan League as they went from their convention at the Nicollet Hotel to join the convention of the Democratic Party at the Radisson to form the DFL. She has been a member of the Democratic National Committee and a frequent delegate to the Democratic National Convention.

At 86, she's talking about going to caucus.

"I've got it really together about four hours a day now, but I just think we have to do something. I mean, look at the economy. Who is speaking for the poor? I mean dirt-poor working people who don't know which way to turn and don't have a way of understanding what's happening to them because nobody will tell them they belong. What on earth is the matter with the DFL? Minnesota used to be a national leader in civil rights. Today civil rights in Minnesota is a joke. A joke. Where is the DFL?"

"Everybody's out there talking about the middle class this, the middle class that. The fastest-growing segment of the population in this country are the poor and a lot of them used to be what you call middle class. That's the real trickle-down. Where on earth is the DFL? No other issue, I don't care what—feminism, abortion, whatever—takes center stage when you have people who don't have enough to eat and no job and no health care."

Yes, ma'am.

CP

*Precinct caucuses in both the DFL and the Independent-Republican parties are March 3. Call the office of a political party to find the location of your neighborhood caucus.*

**At 86, Nellie Stone Johnson is talking about going to caucus. "Minnesota used to be a national leader on civil rights. Today civil rights is a joke. Where on earth is the DFL?"**



Nellie Stone Johnson

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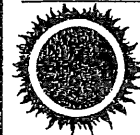


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