

Ventura takes fight for state unicameral forward

LINCOLN (AP) — When Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura talks about the benefits of a unicameral, or one-house, government, he makes some of the same arguments the father of Nebraska's unique system put forth more than 60 years ago.

That doesn't mean Ventura is studying the political moves of former U.S. Sen. George Norris. "I don't even know who he is," Ventura said. "Who is he?"

Ventura may not know that without Norris, a populist from McCook who served in the U.S. House and Senate for a combined 40 years from 1903 to 1943, Nebraska likely would still have a bicameral, or two-house, state legislature.

Ventura doesn't care about Norris. He only cares about the unicameral idea.

"I've only looked at the results and how it works because, really, I am not concerned with who did it," Ventura said.

Norris, who was respected by Republicans and Democrats alike, championed the radical idea of creating a one-house Legislature for years before Nebraska voters in 1934 agreed to make the change.

Sixty-five years later, Nebraska remains the

only state in the country with a unicameral legislature.

The arguments Norris made to persuade Nebraskans to support the idea are strikingly similar to the ones being offered by Ventura in his home state.

Ventura, like Norris, said he favors the unicameral structure because it gets rid of secretive conference committees, it reduces the size of government and it makes it harder for lobbyists to exert influence.

Making his argument sell will not be an easy one for Ventura in Minnesota, just as it was not for Norris in Nebraska.

An opposition group, calling itself OUCH — Opponents of a Unicameral House — has enlisted the help of heavyweight politicians in Minnesota, including three former House speakers and a former GOP state chairman.

They argue that a one-house legislature won't save much money and would concentrate power in the hands of a smaller group, making it easier for key decisions to be made behind closed doors.

Ventura envisions a Legislature with no more than 135 lawmakers, and he wants it to be nonpar-

tisan. That would essentially eliminate the state's 67-member Senate.

Nebraska's Legislature has 49 members. Unlike Nebraska, where a successful initiative petition forced the unicameral issue on the ballot, both the Senate and House in Minnesota would first have to approve of a unicameral plan before it would go before voters for the final decision.

Norris said in his autobiography that Nebraska's state legislators wouldn't have been persuaded to make the switch to a unicameral system.

Convincing the politicians to vote themselves out of office will be Ventura's biggest challenge, said University of Nebraska-Lincoln political science Professor Robert Sittig.

"No one gave him a chance of being elected governor, and after he pulled that off I suppose anything is possible," Sittig said. "But it's an uphill battle."

Ventura concedes it will be a challenge. "There's 70 to 80 of them that have the possibility of not being here anymore," he said. "And professional politicians don't want to lose their profession."

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ROBERT SITTING
UNL political science professor

State Sen. Ernie Chambers has served in Nebraska's Legislature for 29 years, longer than any other current member. It's the people, more than the form of government, that determine how well it works, he said.

"Every state has to choose its own poison, and I'm not in a position to say what would be better for them," Chambers said. "You have fewer miscreants to keep track of when you have a unicameral."

Air Force captain gets jail term

■ Capt. Douglas Bass will serve four months for having affairs with two enlisted women.

OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE (AP) — An Air Force captain will serve four months in a military jail before being dismissed from the service for affairs he had with two enlisted women.

Capt. Douglas M. Bass was sentenced Thursday after pleading guilty to nine counts of violating military law for having sex with the women — including one he later married — and attempts to hide one of the affairs.

Bass also admitted to making a false statement to an investigator and disobeying orders to end his relationship with Krystal Carr, an airman he met at Offutt and married last month.

He also had an affair with an unidentified staff sergeant at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana. That woman was not under his command.

"I take full responsibility for my actions," Bass said at his court-martial Thursday.

Bass read a statement to the court outlining his personal life since joining the military through South Dakota Air Force National Guard in 1987. He told of how his first two marriages failed because he believed his wives were unfaithful. He said he wanted to leave

the military, but when his oldest child was diagnosed with leukemia, he kept his job to provide adequate health insurance for his sick son.

Bass also admitted to suffering a nervous breakdown and later attempting to resign from the Air Force.

"I offer this more as a roadmap of who I am," he said. "I have always felt like a square peg in a round hole while on active duty."

Bass faced up to 28 years in military prison in addition to being dismissed — the equivalent of a dishonorable discharge for officers.

Bass' civilian attorney Andrew Strotman said following the sentencing that Bass was disappointed in the sentence but understands it.

"More than anything, he's just glad it's over," Strotman said.

Strotman said he plans to file a request for clemency with the convening authority for the 12th Air Force.

During testimony Thursday, military attorneys told of how Bass was the commanding officer over Carr and her first husband when their affair started in August 1998, shortly after Carr's husband was deployed to Saudi Arabia.

The night Carr's first husband returned from overseas duty, Bass slept with Carr at the house of another airman, attorneys said.

When military officials learned about the affair in February, they ordered Bass to end it. He denied the relationship to an investigator.

"In February I went in to make a statement to ease my conscience and ease my life," Bass said.

When asked how many times he had contact with Carr after ordered to end their relationship, Bass replied: "I can't put a number on it."

He later said it was definitely more than 100 times.

Carr also refused to end the affair, and she was convicted of violating military law. She served 50 days of a 60-day sentence and was released early for good behavior in May.

Bass, 33, married Carr, 21, last month in Elk Point, S.D., after the divorce from her first husband was finalized.

Military prosecutor Capt. Stephen Romine asked the court to dismiss and imprison Bass. Romine said confinement is "absolutely essential" in this case and urged the military court to consider the fact that Carr's first husband returned from overseas duty to find his commander living with his wife.

Strotman asked the judge to give Bass a "purely military punishment for a purely military offense."

Strotman argued that to confine Bass would stigmatize him as a criminal, subjecting him to civilian criticism and hardship.

No discharge action has been taken against Carr, who was not at her husband's court-martial. Military officials say they expect action to dismiss her will begin next week.



Police conduct autopsy in 'suspicious' death

Lincoln police are investigating the death of an 86-year-old Lincoln man found dead in his home Thursday morning.

Kenneth C. Genuchi was found by a family member, police said. An autopsy was under way late Thursday evening. Police had labeled the death as suspicious until a cause of death can be determined.

Police release identity of man found dead Monday

The identity of a 48-year-old man found dead on a pallet at the TMCO company Monday was released by police as William Sorenberger of 1919 S. 26th St.

Although the cause of death has yet to be determined, Officer Katherine Finnell said police did not suspect foul play.

Officials: Insults sparked fight

A fight broke out near Lincoln

Northeast High School on Wednesday after two white men drove next to and then taunted two black students, police said.

Finnell said two white men, ages 16 and 20, exchanged insults, including racial epithets, with two black Northeast students, aged 16 and 17.

The 17-year-old black student responded to the insults, Finnell said, by throwing a piece of concrete through the driver's side window, which was open, causing a 3-inch cut on the white 16-year-old's chin.

Finnell said a Northeast High School security guard and Lincoln police officers intervened and ended the conflict.

Both the 16-year-old and 20-year-old white men were cited for disturbing the peace. The 20-year-old was jailed.

The 17-year-old black student was charged with third-degree assault.

Compiled by senior staff writer Jake Bleed

The Navigators



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