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**Capitol View**

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**Should We Even Consider a Two-House Legislature?**

Every session of the Nebraska Legislature features what promises to be a real clunker of a bill. This year’s prizewinner – so far – is a proposal to change from a unicameral to a two-house Legislature.

Even the sponsor of the measure (LR2CA) admits that the proposed Constitutional Amendment probably won’t get out of committee. Senator Steve Erdman of Bayard says it will be because of those “people living in the east.” The Nebraska Republican Party included in its platform a plank calling for a “return to a bicameral legislature whereby the upper house has fewer members but larger territorial areas to include a more diverse set of interests in the legislative process.”

Not only is such apportionment constitutionally suspect, but the measure is also a bad idea, party support or not. Let’s take a legislative body that has worked well since 1937 and make it more like Congress, because we know how well that’s working out.

I guess we should be happy that the measure isn’t supporting a theocracy, although I wouldn’t put it past some to propose. In case you’re scrambling to look it up, that’s “government by divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided.” Yes, they’re out there.

Erdman says a bicameral legislature would better represent the interest of Nebraskans, particularly those from areas west of Lincoln. It would result in better representation for rural parts of the state.

Those areas have lost political power as half of Nebraska's population has concentrated in Lincoln, Omaha and the surrounding areas, a trend expected to continue in the future.

If passed by the Legislature, placed on the ballot and approved by voters, the proposal would add a second house to the Legislature with 31 members who represent three counties

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each, along with a lower house with 62 members representing districts apportioned by population. Excuse me, there’s that constitutional problem again.

Two houses would function as a better check on one another than the current system, where the people of Nebraska are referred to as "the second house," Erdman says, claiming that people rarely have an opportunity to vote on petitions or referendums, and aren't likely to make a dent in lawmakers' thinking by testifying during committee hearings.

Never mind that the outspoken senator from the Panhandle has spent his legislative career arguing in the George W. Norris Legislative Chamber, he says he wants people to know not all Nebraskans think highly of Norris, who is said to have worn out two sets of tires driving across the state to advocate for the unicameral legislature.

Norris, who was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1902, later served five terms in the U.S. Senate, changing his party from Republican to independent in 1936.

"Everybody worships George Norris like he was something special — he wasn't," Erdman told members of the press. "He was very liberal, the most liberal senator in the U.S. Senate. His mission wasn't honorable."

Why Republican farmer Erdman decided to trash Senator Norris remains a mystery. But it does prove that he needs a history reminder.

Norris is credited with planning the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which provided flood control and created electricity in the region drained by the Tennessee River. More importantly, the TVA was a forerunner of the Rural Electrification Act (REA), which eventually brought electricity to farms and ranches across the nation.

Think about that when you go back to the farm senator and turn on the lights.

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