

Private, closed-door caucus meetings cover for weak legislators

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Good morning! We are just days away from the 2025 Legislative Session here in Iowa and I'm starting to look forward to it!

On Monday we wrote extensively about the role money has in our state politics. If you missed it, read it [here](#). The crazy thing is you may think it is exaggerated, but I assure you, I have story after story from various legislators that confirm those problems. They're told to be a "team player." They're told they could have "real influence." They're told they could be "an effective legislator." If only they played the game.

Money isn't the only thing that prevents our system from working how it is intended to work. There are also private, closed-door meetings called "caucus meetings." These meetings include ONLY those elected to the chamber representing a political party. So, for example, the Republicans will caucus and the Democrats will caucus.

What is said in caucus is supposed to stay in caucus. Which is weird, because it sure seems like the most honest things legislators say get said in caucus. Yet we the people never hear those things.

Caucus is a chance for discussion between Republicans on certain issues. It's where the actual debate happens. That stuff that you think is debate that takes place on the floor — that stuff is just the recital. The real stuff that matters and would let voters know where a legislator stands on an issue happens in caucus.

I believe the legislature is the only elected body in Iowa that can have a majority of its members meet privately to discuss matters. No, they do not take votes in caucus, but things certainly get hashed out.

A representative or senator may tell their constituents they support a bill or oppose a bill, but in caucus they may take the exact opposite position. The voters will never know.

In addition, sometimes legislators may say what they really think of their party's base about a certain issue. But that is information voters will never get because it happens in caucus.

I don't believe "caucus" should be a thing. I believe that elected officials crafting public policy should craft as much of the policy publicly as possible. And when public policy is discussed privately, well, it isn't being crafted publicly.

And if we're being honest, things don't always stay in caucus. Lobbyists know how to get information. Legislators know how to divulge information. If they want someone to know, they'll let them know.

Over the years there have been struggles related to certain bills that couldn't pass despite Republicans holding a majority in the House or the Senate. But because leadership knows the votes aren't there, the elected officials never have to out themselves as being against it.

A formal vote may not be taken, but conversations are had, votes are whipped and legislators are pulled into a meeting for discussion with leadership. But if they don't get the numbers, the votes never happen publicly.

And voters remain in the dark on why their priorities may not advance while obstructionist, moderate, RINO Republicans are protected because "we have to protect the majority."

Lawmakers will tell you caucus makes their job much easier and less hectic. But I'm not sure our government should utilize what is best for elected officials over what is best for the electorate.

They are supposed to serve the people, after all. It's not supposed to be based on what's "easiest," it's supposed to be of the people, for the people and by the people.

I am not sure how this gets fixed either, sadly. Because the people who need to fix it are the ones who benefit from it. But man, it is fair to wonder what if 20 or 25 of the conservatives elected in the Iowa House said they wouldn't participate in these private, closed-door caucus meetings because it isn't how government should operate?

What if things could be hashed out publicly and lawmakers could let their actual positions and thoughts be known and voters could make decisions at the ballot box with knowledge of what their elected officials actually thought.

Might it make the job of being a legislator more difficult? Yeah, it might. But might it make our system and representative government better? Yes, it would.

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