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BICAMERAL VS. UNICAMERAL LEGISLATURE

I strongly urge that the bicameral legislature be retained for Montana. I have read criticism of the conference committee system. In Montana the conference committee is not "all powerful" nor is it "secret". Every decision of a conference committee must be explained to each house and accepted by a majority vote of each house. They are not secret but operate under the same rules as the standing committees, with two exceptions--1. If not a free conference committee they are confined to the amendment in question and 2. a majority of each house committee must concur, not just a majority of the full 6 member committee.

The very fact we have conference committees points to the reason for retaining the bicameral legislature--that is, the further refinement of the law. I would ask you to read through a Final Statute of any legislative assembly. Note the number of House Bills killed in the Senate and vice-versa and pay particular attention to the controversial nature of those bills or the particular merits of them.

A bicameral system admittedly slows down the legislative process--as Mr. Jess Unruh said it "provides two lines of defense". There is no area of government where the wheels should turn more slowly--once a bill becomes law, then is the time for quick and precise action by the administrative branch.

Unicameralism will deprive rural Montana of access to their legislators. When I speak of rural Montana I refer not only to the area I come from--the vast area east of a line through Billings, Lewistown and Havre--but I speak of all Montanans who live outside of approximately ten population centers. A unicameral legislature serves well in an incorporated city where every citizen has easy access to his city councilman and where every citizen lives within walking distance of City Hall. The simple facts of Montana geography suggest that Montana should be one of the last states to abandon its present bicameral system. A proposal to reduce the number of legislators by means of the imposition of a one-house legislature will almost surely mean the defeat of the Legislative Article at the polls and could jeopardize the ratification of the entire document.

In a bicameral system the Senate, with its longer and staggered terms of office is a well of maturity and stability in the legislative process. The House, all of whose members must face the electorate every two years, is the fountain of change and reform and reflects the immediate mood of the people. Both are necessary for good legislation.