



The way it has always been in the Legislature

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Psychology 101, as it applies to politicians.

If you start with a cage containing four monkeys, and inside the cage hang a banana on a string from the top, and then you place a set of stairs under the banana, before long a monkey will go to the stairs and climb toward the banana.

When that happens all the monkeys are sprayed with cold water.

After a while, another monkey makes an attempt with same result. As soon as he touches the stairs, you spray all the monkeys with cold water.

Pretty soon, when another monkey tries to climb the stairs, the other monkeys will try to prevent it.

Now, put the cold water away. Remove one monkey from the cage and replace it with a new monkey. The new monkey sees the banana and attempts to climb the stairs. To his shock, all of the other monkeys beat him silly.

After another attempt and attack, he knows that if he tries to climb the stairs he will be assaulted.

Next, remove another of the original four monkeys, replacing it with a new monkey. The newcomer goes to the stairs and is attacked. The previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with enthusiasm because he is now part of the "team."

Then, replace a third original monkey with a new monkey, followed by the fourth. Every time the newest monkey takes to the stairs, he is attacked.

Now, the monkeys that are beating him up have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs and they do not know why they are participating in the beating of the newest monkey.

Finally, having replaced all of the original monkeys, none of the remaining monkeys will have ever been sprayed with cold water. Nevertheless, not one of the monkeys will try

to climb the stairway for the banana. Why, you ask? Because in their minds, that is the way it has always been!

This is how it is at times in Nebraska's Unicameral Legislature.

This analogy is very relevant to what can happen in legislative bodies.

A great example is at the national level, where this tendency was made painfully obvious to anyone paying attention.

We witnessed two historic landslide elections, one in 2010 and one 2014, which put Republicans in charge of congress, first in the House of Representatives and then in the Senate. There were Republican historic majorities won in states and local elections all across the country.

The average person sent the Republicans to Washington to stop President Obama's radical agenda to transform America, and repeal the harm of Obamacare and the out of control spending, which represents the "banana" in the monkey cage.

Yet, when the new "monkeys" arrived they found that most of the "monkeys" in the cage didn't want to touch the "banana" because of the fear of the original "monkeys," leadership, and the "cold water," the media.

So, with majorities and a mandate from the people, they refused any serious attempt at undoing the mess and reaching the "banana" out of fear.

In Nebraska, it seems we have similar issues. With only one house, even without a defined leadership it's easier at times to slap down some of the new members of the Legislature and pull them into the comfy status quo.

Senators get pressured to abandon their campaign promises for more "reasonable" positions. We witnessed several of those moments last session.

One of the methods used to maintain "the way it has always been" mentality in the Unicameral is voting by secret ballot for leadership. Secret ballots makes it more likely that deal making can be kept hidden in the weeds, and the "safe" people are elected to provide leadership.

When someone is bold enough to go for the "banana" then words are used as clubs to marginalize them, and stigmatize them into silence or submission.

Accusations of partisanship is another tool to paint the non-conformers as destroyers of the peace and conspirators against the unicameral system as a whole.

In the “non-partisan” Legislature the status quo is cherished, and not so different than other legislative bodies, it is alive a well and needs to be confronted at every opportunity.

Another good example in the Unicameral is that in new senator orientation they train the conservative right out of some new senators. They stress how independent each senator is, even to the point of not listening to their conservative constituents. They are encouraged to forget the promises they made to cut taxes, because Republicans do that and that makes it partisan.

Finally, senators get pretty cozy with the lobbyists and special interests that are often at odds with the people in their district or most of the people in the state.

Spending all that time in the echo chamber of the Capitol and Lincoln throws some senators off track. They serve the lobbyists, rather than their constituents. They are told over and over that incumbent senators rarely loose re-election which implies that they really don't have to do all the things they promised they would do as candidates like cut spending and taxes.

This is why the Legislature is quite often out of touch with the majority of Nebraskans.

Disclaimer: This is meant as no disrespect to monkeys.