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APPROVED: Board of Directors
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CITIZENS LEAGUE OPPOSES CONCENTRATION OF
STATE POWER IN METROPOLITAN REORGANIZATION

To the Governor, the Legislature, local officials and citizens concerned with the governance of the Twin Cities metropolitan area:

Proposals now well advanced in the 1974 Minnesota Legislature would have the effect of vesting in the governor and the State Senate the power to appoint all of the members of all of the major agencies created in the Twin Cities area metropolitan governmental structure.

We believe this would be a serious mistake. We think it must not happen.

If these proposals were enacted:

- * All realistic prospects of the Metropolitan Council and its agencies developing, in the future, as essentially under the local control of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, would be ended. They would become fully agencies of state government.
- * The special-purpose agencies would be strengthened, politically, in such a way as to undercut the coordinating ability of the Metropolitan Council. This would drive most major decisions affecting the Twin Cities area into the Legislature for resolution by a fully statewide body.

This has not been sought, we believe, either by the authors of the reorganization or by the Governor.

But it is the situation that would result.

- * The major proposal would cut off all authority of the Metropolitan Council to name the members of the regional agencies charged with the implementation of its policy plans.
- * It establishes a general concept of state selection of these agencies, which could result in 40 or more appointments by the governor, with confirmation by the Senate, to agencies managing the sewer, park, airport, transportation and other programs in and for the Twin Cities area.
- * And all realistic assessments are, at the same time, that the governor will continue also to name the 15 or 17 members of the Metropolitan Council itself, as the Legislature declines once again to provide for direct election by the people.

This would be basically wrong in principle.

Nothing has been stronger than the conviction that this limited-purpose metropolitan structure, though necessarily and properly created by the state, should be -- and, in time, would be -- politically responsive to the people of the Twin Cities area. Both Governor LeVander and Governor Anderson have stood for this. So has a wide range of private groups. So does the Metropolitan Council itself. So does the public.

It would be wrong also in its practical effects.

Few things have been more broadly agreed-on than the conclusion that the big, regional special-purpose districts must be brought effectively under the direction of an areawide, general policy body -- which is the Metropolitan Council.

If the legislative proposals move through as now designed, both these key objectives -- of local control, and of effectively coordinated development -- would be jeopardized, if not destroyed.

It would represent the end, also, of an unusually promising new approach to the governance of a major urban region.

Minnesota has not become a major focus of attention because the Legislature in 1967 created a new and innovative form of state government. Minnesota is a center of national attention because the Legislature created here a new and innovative form of local government.

We urge all those individuals and organizations that have long been concerned about these issues, of local control and of workability, to speak out again. We urge the Governor to reassert his position. And we urge the Metropolitan Council to work aggressively on these questions of representation and of organization, in the interests of the region, in the time that remains.

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The Citizens League has, from the beginning, recognized the legitimate and necessary role of the state . . . in creating the basic structure for regional governance; in assigning its powers; and in approving its finances.

But the League opposed in 1967, as it opposes today, the total domination of this structure by the state.

The issue with which we are faced today is now new: An analysis of the differing plans for metropolitan organization, published in the February 28, 1967 Citizens League NEWS, for example, said:

"All three legislative proposals build on the basic concept that we simply must not continue on the path of piecemeal proliferation of autonomous and uncoordinated single-purpose districts. . . .

"All legislative proposals agree that we must establish some kind of general-purpose government -- a metropolitan council -- with limited authority to pull together and assure coordination of basic policy decisions which have areawide implications.

"The three legislative proposals point up vividly the fundamental conflict in approach.

"The Rosenmeier-Albertson proposal adopts the concept that metropolitan problems are, in reality, state problems, and that the agency to which the Legislature should assign policy responsibility would be an arm of state government . . .

"The Rosenmeier-Albertson proposal, in this respect, stands alone in basic conflict with the views of every organization which has made a detailed study and has submitted specific proposals. Their proposal would deny to the metropolitan area any voice in the selection of the Metropolitan Council. All members of the Council would be appointed by a single, statewide official, the governor, with the consent of the State Senate. . .

"If there is any single point on which all organizations in the Twin Cities metropolitan area are united, it is in support of the concept that the Metropolitan Council should be selected by, and be responsive to, the people of the area itself.

"It will take far more convincing evidence than has been offered thus far, it seems certain, to obtain broad support for the concept of transferring to the state the control of policy decisions having a vital impact on the future growth and development of our Twin Cities area."

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The establishment of the Metropolitan Sewer Board in 1969, separate from but subordinate to the Metropolitan Council, was a step toward the model of a responsive and workable metropolitan structure.

Members are appointed by the Council -- which provides an essential local character to the agency and, at the same time, gives to the Council a critical authority required to make the 'coordinating' form of metropolitan organization work successfully.

Nothing more clearly signals the turn away from the Metropolitan Council as an essentially local part of the governmental system than the change, proposed this year, to strip away this authority for the Metropolitan Council to name the members of the Sewer Board, and to make the Board, in the future, appointive by the governor.

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There is a further reason why the governor -- any governor -- should not appoint all the members of all the agencies, on both the 'policy' and the 'operational' sides of the metropolitan structure: Such an arrangement would make it difficult if not impossible to have the open debate about major policy issues which could then be settled within the region's own governmental structure.

The relationship established with the sewer program -- in which the Board exists separately in law and owns its own facilities, but is dependent on the Metropolitan Council for its members, for its finances and for its basic policy direction -- has proved a sound one. The Board has moved aggressively, challenging the Metropolitan Council, publicly at times, with its proposals. Yet disputes have, after public discussion, been resolved.

If the service agencies are appointed entirely by the governor, however, a serious risk is created that one of two things will occur:

- * The first is that the area may see a continuing repetition of essentially the controversy that has developed over transit since 1971 -- when a service agency, disagreeing with a policy direction set by the Metropolitan Council, carries its disagreement into the Legislature, to be resolved by a statewide constituency.

The new language about 'relationships' being written this year by the Legislature may help prevent this. But, clearly, the likelihood of failure is increased if the commissions are politically the equal of the Council, rather than -- as when appointed by the Council -- subordinate to it.

- * The second -- and quite different -- risk is that this policy debate will in some instances be suppressed.

Governors, regardless of party, will be inclined not to welcome or to encourage intense public disagreement among their principal appointees. Past a certain point these agencies will be encouraged to work out their differences in private -- however important, from the public's point of view, the clash of opinion may be in helping to ensure a sound decision.

Much of the reorganization proposed this year is sound. The 'coordinating' approach to metropolitan organization is the right one -- and is the one consistently advocated and supported by the Citizens League since 1968. With only the exception discussed in our statement of January 28 (respecting the area of transportation planning, in which we think a serious and fundamental error is being made) we support the structure and relationships being established.

We challenge only the proposal that, once established, this structure be run entirely by appointees of state government, rather than by representatives chosen by the people of the Twin Cities area.

The appointive process is a secretive process. Election is an open process. In Minnesota, at least, this open, public competition for the support of the people is a critical part of what makes our government work. It is also, we believe, the process the public wants.

And election is fully compatible with the 'coordinating' model of metropolitan organization.

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We do not quarrel with the argument, frequently heard by legislators, that the state must be in charge.

It must be. And it is. The Legislature will control the metropolitan structure utterly, as to organization, powers and finances. There is no concept of 'metropolitan home rule.' Nor is any proposed.

The issue is simply whether this structure, once created, is or is not going to be run by persons selected by and responsive to this metropolitan community.

To go further toward state control, through the state appointment of members of all the agencies, would raise the most serious implications -- not only for the Twin Cities area, but also for all local government . . . and for those non-metropolitan legislators who are now excluded from the key decisions, as the Metropolitan Affairs Committees drift increasingly toward a new role as the 'city councils' for the Twin Cities region.

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The right course -- to produce an effective state-created local agency truly representative of and politically responsive to the Twin Cities area -- is still open to the Legislature in 1974.

This is, of course, to provide for the selection of members of the Metropolitan Council through the process of direct election.

We urge that this be done.

We urge -- particularly if this is not done -- that members of the regional service agencies be selected by the Metropolitan Council.

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