

STATEMENT BY GREER LOCKHART
On Behalf of the CITIZENS LEAGUE
Before the Subcommittee on Structure
House Committee on Local and Urban Affairs
March 10, 1977

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee: We appreciate your invitation to appear here today. You have some important issues to resolve, as you move toward action making the Metropolitan Council elective. We have some specific suggestions we hope will be useful.

In summary: We propose that the members of the Metropolitan Council be chosen in an election coinciding with the municipal elections in the fall of 1977, and in a new kind of campaign in which public financing is used in part for a much-expanded program of voter information about the office, the candidates, and the issues.

Let me take the major aspects of our proposal, one at a time.

Districts -- Election should be introduced into the Council as it stands today: with 16 members, representing the districts established by the Legislature in 1974. These districts presently contain about 120,000 persons each -- making them, in size, something between a state Senate and a congressional district.

Longer-term (in the reapportionment following the 1980 census) we believe you should consider enlarging the Council in size -- perhaps to 20-25 members. This would reduce the size of a district, and allow for somewhat fuller representation of particular areas within the Twin Cities region. Experience may prove this to be desirable.

We think you should provide for the Metropolitan Council to do its own redistricting (which is consistent with your general policy toward local government). But we believe it is essential that you also provide for this responsibility to be assumed and discharged promptly by some outside party, should the Council fail to perform it.

Terms -- Members of the Metropolitan Council should be elected for four-year terms. This is long enough for a member to learn his or her job; and short enough to assure he or she will be properly responsive to the voters.

Terms should be staggered. The Metropolitan Council does not make laws and ordinances. Rather, its decisions guide a large and complex program of metropolitan planning and development. A reasonable stability in its policy-making is essential. This would be aided by bringing only half the membership up for election every two years.

Timing of the election - Elections should be held in the odd-numbered year, to coincide with the municipal election day (which we hope you will make uniform). We believe the issues that will arise around the contests for these seats are of the sort that arise in races for local office. They are not most appropriately raised in a campaign filled with issues having mainly to do with state and national office. The first election should -- and can -- be held this fall. We considered the idea of a start in 1979. But this would mean a re-drawing of district lines after only two years. We felt this would unnecessarily confuse Council members and constituents alike.

Character of the Office -- The office should be on the non-partisan ballot, consistent with most races for offices below the state level. This would not preclude, of course, party involvement in the recruitment, financing or endorsement of candidates.

Compensation -- This should be set to attract competent, less-than-fulltime officials. The compensation should be paid as salary, rather than as per diem.

The Office of Chairman -- This is by all odds the most complex issue that arises as the Metropolitan Council becomes elective. It is important, this year, to eliminate the confusion that has surrounded the discussion of this issue in the past.

There are two quite separate questions here. The first is the nature of the office. The second is the method by which it is filled.

With respect to the first, the central objective is to move through this transition to an elected Council without losing those characteristics in the office of chairman that are critical to its effectiveness, and therefore to the effectiveness of the Council itself.

The chairman should, in other words: 1) represent the people of the entire Twin Cities area in a separate, at-large office; 2) be a voting member of the Council; and 3) serve full time.

Once the concept of the office is clearly maintained, it is possible to turn to the second, separate question of the method by which this office is filled.

We believe, first, that it need not be and should not be filled by the members elected to represent the districts. The chairman must stand for the interests of the people of the metropolitan area as a whole. And this kind of leadership is unlikely to emerge from a shadowy process of caucusing among the 16 other members, in which no accountability could be adequately established.

Two other possible methods of selection remain: direct election, and gubernatorial appointment.

Of these, we propose election. We have supported gubernatorial appointment in the past, with a sense that it might not be, and perhaps should not be, the long-term arrangement. It now seems to us that direct at-large election is most appropriate, for a Council whose members will be chosen by voters. We suggest a four-year term.

The second most desirable system of selection would be appointment by the Governor.

The Campaign and its Financing -- We propose an experiment with the election process, designed to maximize voter awareness and understanding -- of the Council, of the candidates, and of the issues in the races for this important new elective office.

We support the proposed experiment with public funds during the campaign that

follows the primary election. On two specifics, however, we urge a change from what is now before you.

First: We believe that in return for financing the campaign, the public is entitled to an improvement in the content and -- if you will -- quality of the campaign. We therefore propose that a part of the public funds available be used for the preparation and distribution of a Voter Information Pamphlet, similar to those coming into use in the western states. This would be put together by an election official, from information supplied by the candidates. It would be mailed to every residence in each district. The cost would amount to about one quarter of the funds available per district. The balance would be for use by the candidates. Among the things the Legislature should require be included in the pamphlet -- along with the normal information about the personal and public life of the candidate -- is a list of the contributors to his or her pre-primary campaign.

We do not make a firm recommendation whether or not the funds to be spent in the general election campaign should be limited to those provided from public sources. There appear to be constitutional issues here which we have not worked-through. Generally, the League has felt that the level of spending in local races is not a problem in Minnesota -- and perhaps should be increased, where that will raise the visibility of the office and the level of voter information. It is contributions that need to be controlled.

Second, with respect to contributions: We think it would be desirable to make an exception to the otherwise desirable limit of \$100 from a single source, in the case of political parties. They can play a useful role in further diminishing the impact of special-interest pressures, through their role in recruiting and supporting candidates, and should be encouraged to do so.

Powers -- No change is implied or required in order to justify election of the

Council. No grant of home-rule authority or sovereignty would accompany the shift to direct election. No authority to decide what tax sources will be used, or at what rates, would be conferred. These powers will, and should, remain with the state government.

Finally, it may be useful to say once again why we think an elected Metropolitan Council is important -- to the Council itself, to the public, and to the state government.

First, and most important: The Metropolitan Council is a general-purpose policy body. . . . a government. It does in fact make decisions that profoundly affect the people, and the economic life, of this region. Its effectiveness, in coordinating the local governments and the private interests within the Twin Cities area will significantly affect the future prosperity of the state of Minnesota. It is a cardinal principle that officials with this kind of general policy authority must be elected.

Second: It is clear, at least in this state, that highly competent people can be produced through the elective system for public offices that are both important and visible. The office of Metropolitan Council member is important. And if the campaign is made visible -- through the voter information program and through areawide election of the chairman, as we propose -- the people of the Twin Cities area need not worry about the quality of the Council members that emerge.

Third: In the initial debate in 1967, the proposal for direct election came as close as a three-vote margin. But the Legislature preferred that this experiment in metropolitan government proceed for some time under a system of appointment. And this has not been unreasonable, through a period in which the issues -- and the structure, powers and effectiveness of the Council itself -- were still taking shape. From 1967 through 1971 no action was taken.

More recently, the trend of opinion has again begun to move in favor of having the members of the Council stand for election. This is reflected in the actions taken in the Legislature. In 1973, election was first approved by the House. In 1975-76 it was again approved by the House, and by the committee in the Senate.

The time has now arrived, in 1977, when final action can be taken.