462

What's on the Public Agenda?

A Report of the Citizens League's Public Leadership Initiative

Spring, 1999

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Table of Contents

Foreword:

The Public Leadership Initiative

The Citizens League's ongoing interest in public leadership issues received increased attention in the fall of 1996, when the League's Board of Directors invited several community leaders to a planning retreat to speak about what they considered to be the most pressing issues facing the community. The Board heard repeatedly about the challenge of rebuilding citizenship and its effect on public leadership, and concluded that the decline of civic participation and trust in government has a negative effect on public leadership.

Out of this discussion came the Citizens League's Public Leadership Initiative, a project designed to examine the state of public leadership in the Twin Cities metropolitan region. The first step of this new project was to interview 56 individuals who had direct experience with the challenges of public leadership — as elected officials or appointed public-sector staff in federal, state and local government; or as leaders in business, education, the non-profit sector, the media and community affairs.

Conducted by League Board members and staff in the summer of 1997, these interviews highlighted several substantive policy issues in need of good public leadership, including quality K-12 education; social issues such as crime, family breakdown and racism; urban growth management and redeveloping the central cities; transportation and transit; and workforce training and development.

In addition to these specific issues, those interviewed saw significant problems in areas such as:

• The creation and manipulation of public opinion. Discussion of issues is trivialized; polling buys elections but not leadership; the media focuses on stories and issues that "sell" while greatly reducing the public policy coverage; powerful interest groups control how issues are defined and discussed.

• Understanding what government does— and how. Too many people, citizens and elected officials alike, don't know who does what in government, or why; there is no clear consensus about what government's role should be; there isn't much rationality to the division of government responsibilities; public officials don't understand what their responsibilities are.

• Public involvement and the nature of government. There are too many career politicians; strategies to "open up" government have become barriers to good leadership; Minnesota's populist tradition equates leadership with elitism; more powerful special interests and increased partisanship has resulted in a focus on short-term issues at the expense of a broader vision.

• The leadership gap in the civic and business sectors. Fewer business people are involved in developing policy solutions to regional issues; citizen involvement has become equated only with volunteerism.

The complete results of these interviews can be found in Appendix III.

The report that follows summarizes the findings of a second round of interviews conducted during the summer of 1998, with elected and appointed officials from local cities, counties and school districts. The opinions expressed by this group are significantly different than those uncovered during the first round of interviews. The current local office holders were much more confident that our public institutions are on track, that they are addressing constituents' concerns as well as jurisdictional needs. The earlier group that included retired office holders and leaders from the education, nonprofit, and media worlds was much more pessimistic, expressing serious concerns about the media's influence, the

public's lack of involvement, and the quality of people attracted to public office.

There are numerous possible explanations for the differing results. It might be that current office holders restrict their focus to problems within their own community, or issues they believe they have the most impact over; thereby leaving larger, regional issues unaddressed. Another explanation might be the tendency to think everything in your own community is fine, and that the "real" problems lie in other communities.

Whatever the exact reason for the variances, the following report presents a unique picture of public leadership in the Twin Cities, based on the participants' personal perspectives at the time of the interviews. And while the report contains the answers to many of our original questions, it leaves us with even more. Therefore, the Citizens League, along with numerous other organizations interested in the challenges of citizenship and public leadership, will certainly continue to examine these issues in the future.

Introduction

In 1998, as part of an ongoing examination of public leadership issues, the Citizens League launched a new project entitled "What's on the Public Agenda?" The purpose of the project was to discover which issues and topics make up official public agendas and to determine the degree to which these issues correspond with the issues the public says are important. The project's working hypothesis was that "the urgent overshadows the important." In other words, we suspected that the time and attention of our public leaders was being overwhelmingly consumed by relatively minor and narrow issues, at the expense of the more important, big-picture issues.

During the summer of 1998, members of the Citizens League's Board of Directors interviewed 49 elected and appointed officials, from metro-area cities, counties, and school districts. These public officials were asked a series of 31 questions about the most important problems facing their jurisdiction, the amount of time spent on these problems, the level of constituent input, etc. These one-on-one interviews were then followed by two focus groups sessions, at which respondents were presented with the survey results and asked for feedback.

Findings

Put simply, the survey results contain a number of paradoxes. At a time when public officials have been criticized increasingly for being out of touch with their constituents, our survey respondents were quite confident that their jurisdictions' efforts, and specifically their official meeting agendas, were on target. These officials, especially the elected ones, told us the right amount of time is being spent on the right issues, that meetings are productive and that official agendas are well aligned with jurisdictional needs.

Our survey respondents also gave their constituents high marks, for both their influence and their aptitude. A majority of the officials we interviewed said they use constituent contact to determine the most important problems facing their jurisdiction. Furthermore, they believe their constituents have the "right" issues on their agendas more often than not, and that the official agendas of their public meetings reflect those constituent concerns.

Exactly which issues are on the public agenda? When asked for the most important problem facing their school district, superintendents did not say student achievement, as public opinion polls or the media might lead you to expect. Instead they pointed to community relations and lack of adequate funding. Similarly, city officials did not say crime, an issue that has been a top public concern for several years. They pointed to development and redevelopment of their business districts and residential neighborhoods, followed by meeting the demand for services.

Survey respondents were also asked about the amount of time spent on their most important problem, and again the responses were paradoxical. Almost 60 percent said they spend either very little or a small amount of time on their jurisdiction's largest problem, yet they believe that is enough.

As for the "urgent overshadowing the important," again, we came across something of a paradox. While survey respondents were quick to reassure us that the important issues are being addressed, they also identified significant obstacles to addressing the big-picture issues and said they would like to spend less time on the mundane details of running their city, county or school district.

One participant said that while the urgent does overshadow the important at times, these things go in cycles, and the important things do get taken care of. Another official noted that once elected officials are confident that the urgent is being taken care, they can then move on to the important.

Still standing in the way of those important issues, though, are several key obstacles that prevent them from even getting on the agenda. Lack of time was by far the number one obstacle cited, followed by lack of citizen engagement, political and personal agendas, and entrenched modes of operation. Corresponding to this lack of time for the big-picture issues was a desire to spend less time on the urgent, including various public meetings and events, phone calls, narrow citizen complaints, paperwork, overseeing office personnel, and handling "politically motivated brush fires."

Promising Practices

We began this project with concerns about the state of public leadership and the degree to which official public agendas match citizens' priorities. Over the course of our work, we heard from elected officials, including mayors and city council, county board, and school board chairs; as well as appointed officials, such as superintendents, county administrators and city managers, and while our results are quite paradoxical, they do highlight a set of conditions under which the important issues receive the attention they deserve.

The Elected Official - Staff Relationship: The relationship between elected officials and staff members is extremely important, according to both our survey results and the focus-group feedback. Appointed officials, such as superintendents and city managers, felt that keeping elected officials on track was at least partially their responsibility. Meanwhile, many of the elected officials we interviewed gave significant credit to their jurisdiction's full-time staff for handling the small issues and educating them about the larger ones. We heard that the relationship between elected officials and staff can be either supportive and trusting or adversarial and hierarchical, depending on the individuals involved, the culture of the particular governmental body, and numerous conscious and subconscious decisions.

This important relationship breaks down when full-time staff decide to wait-out the duration of an elected official's term rather than implement reforms, or withhold valuable information in order to influence a decision. Likewise, elected officials that insist on micro-managing an entire city or county in the weekly board meeting work against a jurisdiction's efforts to address the big-picture issues and virtually guarantee that it will remain bogged down in minutia.

Public Information and Communication: Our survey results also suggest that important issues are more likely to receive the attention they deserve in jurisdictions that have a strong commitment to public information and communication. Many of our survey respondents told us that there is a growing acceptance of funding public information efforts and an interest in exploring the communication and interaction opportunities presented by advances in technology. They also stressed the fact that local governments must stick to public information and avoid public relations campaigns. The public officials we interviewed and those that participated in the focus-groups believe their public information efforts are key to getting and keeping the right issues on the public agenda.

Setting Priorities: As we listened to our survey participants talk about their jurisdictions and the issues on their agendas, the idea of a formal goal or priority setting process continually surfaced. While it came under numerous labels, the basic idea seems to be a valuable exercise for many Twin Cities communities. Both elected and appointed officials report that having previously agreed upon priorities or goals makes meetings more productive and focused. Often conducted after the election of new members to a board or council, efforts to reach an early consensus about how business will be conducted can help avoid problems down the road.

Areas for Further Research

The topics explored by this project are both large and complex, and at its conclusion many questions remain to be answered. While the results of this survey provide valuable insights into what is on the public agenda, they do contradict the results of our earlier round of interviews. In reality, no single survey can fully answer these questions. Therefore, more research is needed to better understand the relationship between citizen concerns, official agendas, and jurisdictional needs.

The local office holders we interviewed also identified the need for additional research into topics that impact the way they do business and function as public leaders. These include the open-meeting law, the salary cap for public officials, and cable television broadcasts of public meetings, all areas that tend to go unnoticed by the general public.

The Open-Meeting Law: Numerous local officials expressed frustration with the open-meeting law and its anti-cohesive impact. We heard that the law often doesn't allow the members of a city council, county board, or school board to interact in the settings they find most conducive to their work. It does not allow time for the group to build relationships, but instead fosters divisiveness.

First enacted in 1957, the purpose and the spirit of the open meeting law remain important. However, it is clearly time for a review. Are the best policies produced by a system that forces colleagues to air their disputes and settle grievances in a room full of people and television cameras? Does the current law give us accountability and openness at the expense of good policy? On the other hand, do we want to go back to an era when decisions were made behind closed doors? What tradeoffs are we willing to make? These questions deserve serious consideration.

Salary Cap for Public Officials: The state of Minnesota has a salary cap for almost all public employees. In addition to the cap imposed by law, public pressure to cut costs and stereotypes about overpaid bureaucrats also work to keep salaries low for many government jobs. This leads to the question "are we being penny-wise and pound-foolish?"

The public officials who participated in our focus-group sessions expressed growing frustration with the situation. There were numerous stories of losing highly-valued employees to jobs in the private sector that paid twice as much. For the region's school districts the problem is not losing superintendents to the private sector, but to other states. This suggests that this not just a public-sector problem, but more specifically a Minnesota problem.

While anecdotal evidence is never a good basis for public policy, it does suggest the need for more in-depth analysis. Are significant numbers of people leaving public sector jobs for opportunities in the private sector? Is money the reason? Are we losing committed public servants to other states? Are public sector employers having more difficulty attracting and retaining employees than private-sector employers?

Our survey findings stress the important role that staff play in maintaining the balance between the urgent and the important. A review and possibly revisions of the salary cap for public employees would be an important step in helping local governments fill these important positions with the best possible people.

Cable Television Broadcasts of Meetings: This issue was raised by several local officials during the one-on-one interviews and again during the focus group sessions. Some officials felt that the TV cameras were turning their meetings into more of a show than a meeting. They believe the cameras make some officials reluctant to take a firm stand, while causing others to take advantage of the opportunity for grandstanding. Other officials believe TV coverage gives citizens an easy way out by allowing them to watch from home instead of having to come to the meeting and

participate. On the other hand, many public officials were satisfied with the fact that some people who otherwise would not follow local government at all, are at least watching the meetings on television. A few officials admitted to watching the television coverage themselves, saying that it allows them to follow the meetings of the parks board or the utilities commission without giving up yet another night at home.

Clearly, more research needs to be done on this medium's impact on the local policy process. Is it making a lazy public even lazier or is it making them somewhat more aware? Do cameras affect elected official's behavior? For better or worse? How many people actually watch these broadcasts? Who watches them?

Conclusion

While we were struck by the paradoxical nature of the survey results, participants in two focus group sessions told us that they do in fact reflect reality. Regardless of what we heard earlier, these local officials are generally pleased with both the amount of time spent on important problems and the productivity of their meetings. Furthermore they are confident that they have the right issues on their agendas, and conscious of both the conditions necessary for serious policy work and the need for more research in particular areas.

In the end, the obvious conclusion is that leadership is full of paradoxes, and that one of the many challenges of leadership in the public sector is learning to accept these paradoxes.

Appendix I: What's on the Public Agenda? - Survey Results

Q. What is the most important problem facing your jurisdiction?

A.	**City Officials**	- Development/redevelopment - Supplying services
	County Officials	- Supplying services
	School Officials	- Community relations - Lack of adequate funding

The 26 city officials we interviewed identified numerous different problems. Development and redevelopment of commercial districts and residential neighborhoods was the most common problem. The second most common problem facing cities was supplying the services demanded with the taxes people are willing to pay. We also heard concerns about supplying services in a fair and reasonable manner, and frustration about which level of government should be responsible for a particular service. The limited number of county officials we interviewed failed to produce any overwhelming consensus, but they shared the problem of supplying the services demanded with the tax revenue available.

The responses received from school officials were somewhat more surprising. Only two school district officials listed student achievement as the most important problem facing their jurisdiction. Instead, the group of school officials saw community relations and financial issues as much greater problems. Included under the heading of community relations were issues such as public perceptions, expectations, and support for public schools.

The survey respondents were also asked about the second and third most important problems facing their jurisdictions, and many of the answers were similar to those above. What one jurisdiction listed as their most important problem, several other jurisdictions were likely to list as among their top three. Housing, aging infrastructure, managing growth, and redevelopment were some of the common responses from city officials. Community relations, school funding and student achievement were frequently listed by school officials. Implementation of welfare reform was listed by multiple county officials.

Q. How much time do you personally spend on the number one problem in any given week?

A. 14% Very little time (0-2 hours a week)
45% A small amount of time (3 - 8 hours a week)
29% A significant amount of time (9-20 hours a week)
10% A majority of time (21 or more hours a week)

Q. When in official public meetings, how much time is spent by the full board and various committees in discussing and attempting to solve or rectify the jurisdiction's number one problem?

A.   14% Very little time (< 5% of available meeting time)
           41% A small amount of time (5 - 20% of available meeting time)
           33% A significant amount of time (20-50%)
           10% A majority of time (over 50%)

Q. In your opinion is there adequate time dedicated by the council/board in public meetings to address this problem?

A.   69% Yes
           4% No, too much time
          24% No, not enough time

When combined, the responses to these three questions strike us as particularly interesting. While 59 percent of respondents report that they personally spend either "very little" or only "a small amount" of time on the number one problem facing their jurisdiction and 55 percent report that their full group spends either "very little" or "a small amount" of time on it, a startling 69 percent of respondents believe this is adequate.

The time allocation is similar for the second and third most important problems. In this case, 57 percent said that they personally and 61 percent said that their full group spends either "very little" or a "small amount" of time on these issues, and 55 percent believe this is adequate.

Elected officials were slightly more likely to say that enough time was being spent on the most important problem. Of the officials we interviewed, 56 percent of elected officials compared to 44 percent of appointed officials said adequate time was being devoted to the jurisdiction's number one problem.

Q. How do you know what the most important problem is? On what do you base your opinion? (multiple responses were accepted)

A.   61% Constituent contact
          51% Discussion/contact with other public officials
          45% Staff reports (written and verbal)
          23% Media (newspapers, TV or radio news, etc.)
          55% Other

Almost all of our interviewees said their assessment of what issues are the most important was based on a combination of sources. While the media is often criticized for having too much influence on policy makers, in this survey it was the least often cited source. Meanwhile, a majority of our respondents said their assessments were based, at least in part, on contact with constituents.

Given the fact that these are local officials, it seems quite plausible that constituent contact outweighs the media's influence. The major media outlets in the Twin Cities give only limited coverage to the issues before suburban city councils, county boards, and schools boards, while these local officials reside full-time in the communities that they serve and therefore have numerous opportunities for interaction with their constituents.

Q. Do you believe the public — your constituents — have the "right" issues on their agenda?

A. 14% Yes, all of the time
59% More often than not
20% Often not
4% No, rarely

Q. Does the "official" agenda of public board/council meetings reflect the concerns of constituents?

A. 45% Yes, very closely
49% Yes, to a degree
4% No

As these statistics demonstrate, the public officials we interviewed do not see a substantial "disconnect" between their agendas and the concerns of their constituents. An overwhelming 94 percent report at least some degree of a match between the two.

The responses from elected and appointed officials were quite different, though. Elected officials were much more likely to say that official agendas reflect constituent concerns "very closely." Seventy-nine percent of elected city officials said the official agendas of public meetings matched constituent concerns very closely, but only 25 percent of appointed city officials agreed. Similarly, 56 percent of elected school officials said their agendas reflect constituent concerns very closely, while only 11 percent of appointed school officials agreed.

What mismatch they did see was credited to the fact that some agenda items are internal business such as hiring and contracts that are of little interest to the average citizen. One respondent told us, "The only mismatch is a matter of time, not subject — public deliberation is a lengthy process," while another said, "Constituent contact tends to be very specific — it may relate to the larger picture but be more confined or narrow in scope — their question is 'how does this effect me?'"

Q. Jurisdictional needs and the topical issues addressed at public board / council meetings are ...

A. 41% Closely aligned
47% Generally aligned
12% Not very well aligned
0 Poorly aligned

This response seems to complete the chain, leading to a public agenda with the "right" issues on it. Our survey respondents believe their constituents have the "right" issues on their agendas, official agendas reflect these constituent agendas, and therefore, public meetings are addressing the jurisdiction's needs.

Q. In general, official public board/council meetings are...

A. 20% Extremely productive
59% Generally productive
18% Somewhat productive
0   Not productive

Survey respondents identified several keys to productive meetings and overall success as a local government.   Productive meetings, they said, depend on both staff and officials doing their homework and coming to meetings prepared. Other keys include having stakeholder involvement at all stages of the process and having a previously agreed upon governance model, agenda setting process, or strict schedule.

Q. What obstacles keep important issues off of the official agenda, or relegate them to minor roles?

A. The survey identified several key obstacles that prevent important issues from getting on the agenda. The number one obstacle was a lack of time, especially for part-time officials. Also listed as obstacles were a lack of citizen engagement, political and personal agendas, entrenched modes of operation, and cable television coverage of meetings. The perceived inability to solve a problem or the lack of resources to do so were also given as reasons why important issues are not addressed.

Q. How would you like to spend your time as a public official differently?

A. The responses to this final question, more than any other, suggest that the urgent is in fact overshadowing the important in terms of the daily activities of these public officials. Both elected and appointed officials at the city, county, and school district level said they would like to spend less time on "the mundane details of running a city [county or school district]." These included various public meetings and events, phone calls, narrow citizen complaints, paperwork, overseeing office personnel, and handling "politically motivated brush fires."

The public officials we interviewed seemed desperate for more interaction with other jurisdictions and opportunities to discuss issues at the metro level. Large numbers also reported needing more time for planning and evaluation. Among appointed officials there seemed to be the feeling that they are trapped in their offices and lack the time to make real connections with their communities and/or schools. Elected officials were much less likely to report this and more often felt that appearances in the community were consuming too much time.

Appendix II: Participants

"What's on the Public Agenda?" was co-chaired by Peter Hutchinson and Joan Anderson Growe, with the assistance of steering committee members Sally Evert, Marie Grimm, Jean Harris, Carl Holmstrom, Tom Johnson, and Jim Rickabaugh.

The Citizens League greatly appreciates the time and input of the following public officials who agreed to be interviewed for this project.

Bob Benke
Mayor, New Brighton

Michael Bisanz
Mayor, West St. Paul

Ted Blaesing
Superintendent,
White Bear Lake

Thomas Bollin
Superintendent,
Robbinsdale

Dan Bostrom
City Council President,
St. Paul

Jon Brekke
Mayor, Shakopee

Robert Burlingame
Mayor, Maple Grove

Charles Cheesebrough
School Board Chair,
Centennial District 12

Jackie Cherryhomes
City Council President,
Minneapolis

Jack Denzer
Mayor, Cottage Grove

Jerry Dulgar
City Manager, Crystal

Kevin Edberg
School Board Chair,
White Bear Lake

Tom Egan
Mayor, Eagan

Matt Fulton
City Administrator,
New Brighton

Roger Giroux
Superintendent,
Anoka-Hennepin

Bill Green
School Board Chair,
Minneapolis

Gary Hagstrom
School Board Chair, Eagan-
Mendota Heights-West St. Paul

Tom Hedges
City Administrator,
Eagan

Daniel Jett
Superintendent,
Minnetonka

Randy Johnson
Chair, Board of Commissioners,
Hennepin County

Carol Johnson
Superintendent, Minneapolis

Ben Kanninen
Superintendent,
Burnsville-Eagan-Savage

Elizabeth Kautz
Mayor, Burnsville

Stephen King
City Administrator,
Savage

Martin Kirsch
Mayor, Richfield

Greg Konat
City Manager,
Burnsville

Dianne Krogh
City Manager,
West St. Paul

Al Madsen
City Administrator,
Maple Grove

John McClellan
Superintendent,
Centennial District 12

Michael McGuire
City Manager,
Maplewood

Peter Meintsma
Mayor, Crystal

Keith Moberg
School Board Chair,
Robbinsdale

Robert Monson
Superintendent, Eagan -
Mendota Heights -West St. Paul

Kathleen O'Brien
City Coordinator,
Minneapolis

Jan Ostazeski
School Board Chair,
Columbia Heights

Myra Peterson
Chair, Board of Commissioners,
Washington County

Mary Thornton Phillips
School Board Chair, St. Paul

James Prosser
City Manager, Richfield

George Rossbach
Mayor, Maplewood

Vicki Roy
School Board Chair,
Burnsville-Eagan-Savage

Ryan Schroeder
City Administrator,
Cottage Grove

James Schug
County Administrator,
Washington County

Jeff Spartz
County Administrator,
Hennepin County

Jerry Splinter
City Manager, Coon Rapids

Bill Thompson
Mayor, Coon Rapids

Joy Tierney
Mayor, Plymouth

Dave Unmacht
County Administrator,
Scott County

Scott Wasiluk
School Board Chair, North St. Paul -
Maplewood - Oakdale

Michael White
Superintendent, North St. Paul -
Maplewood - Oakdale

Note: The individuals listed above held the stated positions at the time they were interviewed.

Appendix III: Results of 1997 Interviews

About the Interviews

The Citizens League has embarked on a major project to look at the state of public leadership in the Twin Cities today. The purposes of the project are to (1) define what public leadership is—and ought to be—in terms that are meaningful in today's political and social climate; and (2) develop proposals for tangible, practical steps the League and others could take to develop and support public leaders in Minnesota and the Twin Cities.

As the first stage of the project, members of the Citizens League board interviewed 56 individuals who have direct experience with the challenges of public leadership—as elected officials or appointed public sector staff in federal, state and local government; or as leaders in business, education, the non-profit sector, the media and community affairs. The League appreciates the gracious and thoughtful cooperation of these public leaders.

Sharon Roe Anderson	William Finney	Chris Park
David Beal	Brian Herron	Tim Pawlenty
Stacy Becker	Karen Himle	Tim Penny
Peter Benner	Peter Hutchinson	Orville Pung
John Brandl	Ron James	Al Quie
Richard Braun	Curt Johnson	Shelly Regan
Dick Broeker	Lani Kawamura	James Rickabaugh
Larry Buegler	A.M. (Sandy) Keith	Dan Salomone
Gerald Christenson	Kenneth Keller	Lyall Schwarzkopf
Dan Cornejo	Reatha Clark King	James Solem
Kenneth Dayton	Joel Kramer	Tom Swain
Charles Denny, Jr.	Rick Krueger	Imogene Treichel
Gail Dorfman	George Latimer	Kathryn Tunheim
Steven Dornfeld	Larry Laukka	Bruce Vandal
David Doth	Dan McElroy	Winston Wallin
Dave Durenberger	David Metzen	Laura Wittstock
Judith Eaton	David Morris	DeDe Wolfson
Jon Elam	Ted Mondale	Lee Pao Xiong
Joe Errigo	Rafael Ortega	

While the conversations were broad-ranging, we focused on four major questions:

1. What are the most important public challenges that must be addressed in the Twin Cities?

2. What are some of the barriers that leaders encounter when trying to get something done today?

3. What are the main gaps in leadership?

4. What is the most important contribution the Citizens League could make to improve the quality of public leadership on the top-priority community problems? If the Citizens League were to conduct a study committee on a public leadership issue, what would be the most practical, tangible, useful focus for such a study?

We assured our interview subjects that their comments would not be attributed to them directly. The interviews were conducted by League board members, occasionally with the assistance of staff. This summary, prepared using the written notes of volunteers and staff, represents our best effort to report the individuals' comments. We have included quotations to give the reader a better sense of the tone of the discussions; however, because the discussions were not tape-recorded and because some of these conversations are recounted second-hand, these quotations should be considered approximate.

Substantive policy issues in dire need of good leadership

K-12 EDUCATION
Number of persons mentioning: 22

When asked "What are the most important public challenges that must be addressed in the Twin Cities?," the public leaders we interviewed overwhelmingly mentioned elementary and secondary education. But while the interviewees agreed that K-12 education was a critical challenge, they had a wide variety of views about what the problems were—or how to solve the problems.

Several leaders said the challenge was to improve the educational achievement of students who are now failing, including African American students, whose test scores and dropout rates are worse than their white peers. One person said schools must be preparing a work force capable of competing in a high-tech, global economy, while another complained that the business community was being permitted to set the education agenda: "Schools must create citizens, not just workers."

Several comments pointed to underlying tensions related to racial and geographic division. "Middle-class whites will not send their children to public schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul," said one person. Others said that "it does no good to blame the schools," while others noted that regardless of the reality of inner-city schools, negative perceptions are feeding a flight to suburban or private schools.

The comments of our interview subjects reflect the highly symbolic role of public schooling. The debates about how to improve K-12 education appear to have as much to do with the public's views about civic life in general as about learning per se. "Busing has been a disaster," one person said. "Without the school as a focal point, the community breaks down. Schools are fundamental to community." Another person commented that "all the language in the debate about education is about parents having the right to choose for their child. What's not talked about is responsibilities and rights of citizenship, the societal obligation to ensure an adequate education for everyone." Another said that "if we have an 'everyone on their own' ethic, we lose. How do we build a community purpose that includes everyone?"

In response to our questions, two interviewees said point-blank: There is no consensus about what the problems are or how education could or should be improved. Nor is there much of a consensus on the fundamental question of what kids should know and be able to do.

RACE AND DIVERSITY
Number of persons mentioning: At least 15

At least 15 leaders listed the issues of race and diversity as critical issues needing public attention. Others mentioned race and diversity matters in the context of other substantive issues. Again, however, there were a variety of views about what exactly the challenges are.

To some of our interviewees, the problem is a general inability or unwillingness of the predominantly white Twin Cities community to accept and respect people of color. Because of our long history of relative homogeneity, the region isn't prepared for a diverse society. Racism is killing us, one person said. The community has to "understand the consequences of insisting upon white privilege," said another. Others talked about people's tendency to blame "those people" for ruining "our" Twin Cities. "People in the suburbs have found a way out and think they are safe from the threats of poor and minority people," another commented.

One of our interviewees observed that in the Twin Cities, the expectation is that people who come here must become like those who are already here. People should be more open to newcomers, and the community should think of itself as an evolving, changing place, the leader said. But another noted in an aside that many city residents are "people without the roots to keep us behaving."

The community's attempts to deal with increasing diversity have created new problems, said one leader; multiculturalism has itself become a barrier to dealing with education and other important problems. "Multiculturalism rejects the notion that people not of the place have anything to say about an issue, and says it's not proper to question someone's values or opinions," the leader said. "The rule is that each group is not to be judged by any other group. It's a pernicious, anti-intellectual notion." If personal anecdote becomes an acceptable form of dialogue, our ability to have a dialogue at all erodes, the leader said, adding that "personal anecdote always trumps. It's not a valid form of persuasion."

CRIME
Number of persons mentioning: 11

Crime was also on the minds of the leaders we talked with. But not just any crime; it was violent crime, and violence perpetrated by youth, that seemed most troubling. "Kids are committing serious crimes before age ten," said one person, who noted the recent increase in juvenile murder cases. Courts are dealing primarily with youth, primarily young men, the individual said.

The reality of crime—and the fear of crime—both are driving the abandonment and decay of inner-city neighborhoods, we heard. "In areas where people won't go out at night, they're afraid of kids, not adults," one person said.

The public and public leaders must examine the connection between crime, public safety and race, one of our interviewees said. In Minnesota, about 220 women are incarcerated and 5,000 men (over half of whom are minorities), the leader said. Another said that Minnesota may have a higher proportion of its population of color incarcerated than any other state; 50 percent of the prison population are people of color, compared with 8 percent of the general population, the person said.

Another leader suggested that a solution to youth crime will require attention to the "societal piece"— such as providing more employment opportunity for low-income parents and more affordable child care. Another commented that young people's perception of their economic opportunity is important; "society unravels" if people don't believe they have economic opportunity, this leader said.

FAMILY BREAKDOWN
Number of persons mentioning: 3

At least three people mentioned "family structure and effectiveness" explicitly in their list of the public's most pressing problems. The indicators of trouble include rising out-of-home placements, declining participation in parent-teacher conferences and PTA, said one interviewee. Another leader said that the "first, second and third priorities" of public leaders should be "the way kids are brought up in the inner city." (The speaker clarified that this includes a constellation of issues including family structure and dysfunction, values, child health and related concerns.) "We see the effects of this problem in school failure, youth crime and so on," the leader said, but people have difficulty talking about the problem. "There is no consensus that there is a problem, and no consensus about what to do," the leader said.

Others we interviewed mentioned family breakdown in conjunction with other policy concerns. While talking about the problems of education, one person mentioned University of Minnesota professor Sam Myers' recent study of student test score differences. Myers' findings were that "the things that matter [to student achievement] are the things that families do—but we don't talk about that because it isn't nice," this person said.

Family dysfunction was also mentioned in connection with youth crime. Divorce and out-of-wedlock births (the latter, higher in the core cities and among the minority population) contribute to crime among young people, some respondents said. "We need better development of values in children prior to the age where they're unsupervised," one person said; "thirteen and fourteen-year old kids end up baby-sitting younger kids, even before they have developed values to enable them to set a good example."

URBAN SPRAWL/GROWTH MANAGEMENT/ INNER-CITY REDEVELOPMENT
Number of persons mentioning: 13

The Twin Cities should be more concerned about urban sprawl, according to 13 of the leaders we talked with. But there wasn't as much agreement about whether the region is ready or willing to make the tough choices to stem it.

One leader suggested that "we need philosophical and political debates" on the question: "Should we invest in the inner cities or continue to expand the suburbs?" But others observed that there has been debate—it's just that there doesn't appear to be agreement about the answer. One leader said that "there is a schizophrenia about the management of growth." While it makes more sense to do compact development, this person said, "all the social pressures work against what makes sense." Another reflected that "I'm not sure suburban areas are ready to accept the much higher density of development the Metropolitan Council's plans suggest."

Others said that leaders simply have to be more forceful about insisting on the correct policies. "The Met Council and each individual city needs to really address the hard choices...we need to stop allowing development on the fringes, we need to start to insist on higher density infill development," according to one interviewee.

A few suggested that some technical know-how will be needed in order to reverse sprawled development patterns. The region will have to learn how to make better use of existing land and existing

infrastructure. "The public sector has a hard time doing mixed-use urban development on its own, and so do private developers," one person said. This leader added that the Twin Cities region "should be on the forefront of figuring out how to move the public-private relationship up a notch." That relationship may be hindered by ideological conflicts about whether the "free market" should be left to shape the region's development, another person suggested.

Three other issues that are closely related to urban growth were also mentioned:

• **Segregation/economic polarization.** At least eight people mentioned the Twin Cities region's distinction as one of the most economically and racially segregated metro areas in the U.S., and the growing disparities between central cities and suburbs. A few suggested that reversing the trend is a matter of public education and persuasion: "people aren't aware of how segregated the metro area is," said one, and another suggested that we have to "[get] real about what makes our community vital."

The spatial patterns are cause and effect of social division, we heard. Division and divisiveness are a problem of political boundaries, social and economic classes, and racial division, one person said. "We've come to be more narrow in our attitudes about our community," said another, and "this is feeding a have-have not economic system, a sense that other people's problems are irrelevant."

• **Housing.** Five people mentioned housing issues, including the relationship between housing and urban sprawl. The "affordability gap" remains, better links are needed between housing and jobs, and the Metropolitan Council is not pushing suburban communities to set—or meet—more ambitious goals for affordable housing, we heard. And leaders should be concerned about the availability of enough senior housing to accommodate baby boomers, who will start retiring after 2010, one person said.

• **Infrastructure.** The region's physical infrastructure—and the demands placed on it by unfettered urban growth—were mentioned by four people. One leader cautioned that "our region's infrastructure is neither complete nor ready to survive the next century. The state has itself spread so thin, especially with regard to its physical plant, that it's not doing anything well."

TRANSPORTATION AND TRANSIT
Number of persons mentioning: 14

Fourteen of the leaders we interviewed mentioned transportation and transit, often as an example of what might be called a "pure leadership" challenge. Their view seems to be that the solutions to our transportation problems are well-known, and the major impediment to implementing them is a lack of leadership. (It should be noted that some of the people who said the region needs better transit equated "mass transit" with "light rail transit.")

"We're maintaining the roads with bubble gum, and starting to look like other states," one person said. Downtown Minneapolis is being cut off by lack of access—one reason for the departure of American Express, according to another. Appropriate transit is crucial to the region's effort to help low-income people become educated and move into good-paying jobs, another leader said.

Another person noted that since 1967 public leaders have debated whether the public sector should shape the demand for infrastructure or expand to serve demand. Overall, in transportation, we're still

reacting to demand, this leader said. But what's needed, according to several of our interviewees, is a balanced transportation system that reduces dependence on the single-occupant vehicle and the demand for more highways. To do that, the state's "antiquated system for raising and distributing transportation dollars," now embedded in the state constitution, will have to be overhauled.

What's stopping us? The majority of those who spoke about transportation said that it's an issue of political will. Compromise is available on transportation and transit funding, they said. "This is an issue that has to go to the leadership at the highest level," said one person. Another was more pointed: "The Governor has to take this on and get a deal."

EMPLOYMENT/WELFARE REFORM
Number of persons mentioning: 10

Minnesota has done a good job of putting together its design for welfare reform, but the continuing "devolution" of responsibility from the federal government to the state will produce chaos for some time to come, according to several of our leaders. Devolution is producing a "crisis" that is "on everyone's agenda," and "how we respond to this indicates how well we are able to deal with future possibilities" in general, we heard.

Welfare reform efforts have not addressed the hard issue of employment, several people said, and there isn't an easy public-sector fix for jobs. The problem was variously described as one of finding or creating jobs for people, on the one hand (that is, good-paying jobs that will support a family and that offer some upward mobility); or helping people to become more capable of landing the jobs that are there ("there is a disconnect between the jobs that are available and the skills people have...we need to improve people's skill level," said one person).

OTHER POLICY ISSUES MENTIONED

In addition to the broad policy issues described above, the list of policy challenges includes a few other issues that were mentioned by four or fewer people. These issues are:

• **Economic development in a changing economy.** Three people said the state and region must focus on developing a sustainable economic position in a global economy.

• **Post-secondary education.** Four people commented on post-secondary education issues. Three expressed concern that the University of Minnesota has become less attractive over the past decade, and that the perceived slippage is effecting the state as a whole. "We're in a knowledge- and information-intensive world," one person said, adding that "the private sector is keeping us afloat in this area." Public leaders must enunciate goals for the University and convince the "person on the street" about the U's importance to the state, another person said. Another said that the state must reduce the costly duplication and overlap in its higher education system, and direct more state resources to students rather than institutions.

• **Health care.** Three people warned that health care costs will soon be on the rise again. The market did not fix health-care cost inflation, one person said. The Twin Cities region now has a health-care market controlled by four or five major systems, but "no one is willing to deal with anti-trust in health." Minnesota also needs to address the problems associated with an aging population, the state's heavy dependence on institutional care and the unrealistic expectations of the middle class, said another interviewee.

The problems with leadership today

We asked our collection of public leaders to reflect on the "state of the art" of public leadership today. What are some of the barriers that leaders encounter when trying to get something done today? What are the main gaps in leadership?

The following paragraphs summarize the themes we heard in the responses. Passages in italics are approximate quotations.

THE CREATION AND MANIPULATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

How the public comes to know about an issue, and the terms in which issues are framed, have a powerful impact on the public's ability to solve problems. Too often, the discussion of issues is superficial and public opinion is manipulated to serve narrow interests.

Public leaders are depending too much on public opinion polling. Polling is used to identify the public's concerns, then targeted mailings and push-pull marketing are used to define the issues in palatable terms and mobilize narrow constituencies. The process may identify issues well. But while poll-driven politics can buy an election, it doesn't buy leadership.

> *The way in which we cobble together majorities, by targeting messages with mailings and phoning to various interest groups, means we've only managed to pull together several separate interest group messages—we haven't united people around one over-arching message.*

The way policy ideas are packaged and sold tends to polarize and trivialize debate. People who understand the mass media—particularly organized interest groups—can manipulate the media to appear as if they are leading, even though they have no real solutions to any problems. Far too many issues get polarized immediately as a result of media hysteria generated by interest groups.

> *Can we expect any more of the leaders than we expect of the public? Only a rare leader will educate the public. How do you educate a public that doesn't want to be educated? How do you get from pandering to leading?*

> *There is no market for taking on the big issues. People do not feel challenged to deliver on the big issues, so they're dealing with petty stuff. You have to create the market [for any idea] now...by hiring PR firms. You have to be able to "bumper sticker" an issue to make it fly. All your work can go down the drain when the opposition hires a hired gun with access and shoots you down. It is hard to articulate an idea, but you can beat an idea down with one word.*

The media are thwarting public-spirited discussion. The way journalism has been run has degraded communities. Journalists talk about the public's "right to know" but the media's judgment about what's important to know about is poor. Coverage of serious policy questions has declined, while the emphasis on crime, sports, lifestyle and popular culture has increased. There is less public education, discussion and consensus building about important issues such as transportation that people ought to know about. The superficial way issues are treated gives citizens the impression that they (citizens) know and understand the issues, even when they don't—and that leads citizens to disparage people who have real expertise. And the media's disregard for privacy and civility is scaring talented people away from public leadership.

If the Legislature had to reenact the 1967 metro sewer act or the 1971 fiscal disparities act, would the news media even cover these issues?

There are no ethics now; a person's kid is even a news item. It's sickening and it may be one of the reasons creative people from the private sector don't contribute to the public solution.

No one wants to subject themselves to the negative, shallow, persistent, pathological desire of the media to find fault. It's vicious.

Special interest groups not only exert control over decision making through their financial clout, they play a critical role in shaping public opinion. The proliferation of interest groups is, in part, an outgrowth of the expansion of government's role. Over several decades of strong economic growth, Americans chose to insert government into areas it had never been. And once government is in, interest groups crop up to protect and defend their interests. Powerful groups that know how to use the media can succeed in defining problems in terms that polarize and block constructive solutions.

The whole purpose of joining such a group is to be pure. You lose membership if you're too pragmatic, so there's no incentive to come together. Compromise is defeat..

UNDERSTANDING WHAT GOVERNMENT DOES—AND HOW

Citizens, and sometimes elected officials, don't know who does what in government. Today's schools are not providing basic civics education. The public needs a "government 101" course. The public's understanding of economics is also pretty paltry, and the lack of understanding dooms attempts to develop more rational taxing and pricing policies for public services.

The public doesn't seem to be sure what government's role should be. The public needs a discussion about the appropriate role of government—not just about what government shouldn't be doing, but about what government could or should do.

For 50 years, the political debate has been over which large entity suited your needs the best—big government or big business. The core of the DFL was the New Deal delivery system; its delegates pledged allegiance to the machine. For Republicans, the core was the social conservative activists. The concept of big government and big corporations taking care of you is no longer a fashionable idea. What is the new social compact?

[The Citizens League should] engage the various players in understanding the ability of public decisions to influence private decisions. What are the limits of this ability? Public decisions can be made without understanding that they cannot control private decisions. The legislature can try to control a business, but the business can go elsewhere. For many companies, it doesn't matter much where they are located.

There isn't much rationality to the division of government responsibilities at various levels—federal, state, city, school board. It's up to leaders to make some sense about whether government belongs in various activities, and if so, at what level of intervention.

That problem is particularly thorny when it comes to metropolitan issues, because none of our current governmental structures—municipalities, counties, states—may be appropriate for dealing with regional concerns that spill over 13 counties and the Minnesota-Wisconsin border. Leaders should be thinking "outside the box" about whether entirely new structures are needed for the governance of regions.

> *We need to get under control: What are state issues, what are metro issues, what are local issues? It's idiotic for the City of St. Paul to build a hockey arena for a state team.*

> *Where is it written that the United States will always have 50 states? Maybe we should define the 20 or so counties around Minneapolis and St. Paul as a state....Our Constitutional form of government worked well for 200 years, but is the structure we have today suited to our problems? We tend to think short term; we have to think about how we'll solve our problems over the next 200 to 300 years. We have to think differently.*

Public officials often don't understand what their responsibilities are. New legislators don't necessarily understand the legislative process. Members of school boards, city councils and appointed commissions may not know what the appropriate role of their entity is. Political leaders need an education in the basics—legislative process, strategic planning, board of director training, fiduciary responsibilities. Boards and commissions such as the Board of Regents should examine and clarify what they are there to do—and define the expectations for their candidates accordingly.

> *The Board of Regents, city councils and others can't get good people to run because it takes too much time and there's no reward in it.*

> *Nobody wants to steer. Everybody wants to row and have their hands on the details.*

> *I don't know how to train leaders not to micro-manage. [In my experience serving on a school board] the school board members didn't understand the big problems—so they spent lots of time on the little problems.*

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNMENT

Many of the policies that were designed to open up government to public participation have become a barrier to good leadership. The plethora of federal and state regulations stipulating public involvement and input have mostly been to the benefit of those with narrow interests. It takes much more time to get anything done—and the longer the process becomes, the more time opponents have to organize the troops and manipulate public opinion.

The constant presence of the press and public has also contributed to a decline in basic courtesy in meetings, as officials think of their meetings as theater and feel free to insult one another publicly.

> *The Open Meeting Law means you can never float an idea or have a discussion. It forces leaders to act stupidly and the public to become cynical.*

> *By opening up participation more, by increasing the openness and access to lots of information, we've made the system complicated. We've created lots of points of access that mostly benefit lobbyists. We've facilitated conflict. We're haggling over minutiae, picking small fights and declaring winners and losers, rather than seeing the policy context. We have to figure out a way to negotiate and accommodate with some privacy.*

At some point, you've got to be able to close the door, work things out and cut a deal.

Minnesotans have an egalitarian and populist tradition that causes them to view leadership with suspicion. We are more concerned about "fairness" than about ability and merit, are more oriented to accountability for process than for outcomes. The tendency here is to over-emphasize grass roots public involvement at the expense of knowledge and leadership.

Minnesotans also strive for consensus, even at the cost of real debate. While the tradition of civility is generally a good thing for public life, the assumption that consensus is the best way may prevent us from having harder debates and engaging in constructive disagreement. And viewing consensus as a pre-requisite for action means that sometimes action never happens.

> *There is very little room for leadership here. The populist expectation views leadership as antithetical. The Minnesota notion is that if you allow status, others are in danger. We are not willing to acknowledge back ground and expertise, or positional power.*

> *Minnesotans are willing to accept mediocrity as long as the process is fair.*

> *...the model of consensus is that we all come together to discuss problems. It's sitting around talking and talking. We don't think of consensus as innovation that succeeds, builds credibility and produces momentum. Get the key people, start with an idea, get reactions, and do something—be action-oriented.*

> *Minnesota may be too grass-roots oriented. How do you ever reconcile differences at that level? Grassroots politics is politics of passion—people who are willing to pay the price for the cause. It creates polarization and makes it hard to compromise.*

> *....sometimes there is manure below the grass roots.*

THE LEADERSHIP CRISIS IN GOVERNMENT

"Politician" has become a professional career path, and that is diminishing the quality of policy-making. The members of the legislature are mostly farmers, lawyers (many of whom have never practiced law), public employees and professional legislators who want to be elected politicians their whole life. A large number have conflicts of interest; for instance, they make their living teaching or farming while setting education or agricultural policy as legislators.

Professional politicians are unwilling to take risks because there is too much to lose in not getting re-elected. Decisions are calculated to sustain that career path, and often that means caving in to pressure groups.

It's important to get better people in politics who want to make a difference but who aren't linked to special interests and who don't want to make a career out of politics. But talented people in the private sector no longer view the legislature as a place to exercise leadership. The "job" doesn't pay well and unless one is an executive or has great job flexibility, there is no way to devote the time to serve in office.

Who is willing to take the risks to serve in elective office? The ambitious. Personal ambition is one of the main qualities of elected officials. The system rewards people who are willing to do anything to get elected or get a bill passed. Winning an election is self-ratification.

22

The result of the trend is that the quality of the Legislature has declined and issues have become more politicized. There has been a decline in support for regional and statewide solutions to issues, increased parochialism, and a lack of vision.

> *There are not enough risk takers. We need more courage. We need more people who are willing to not be re-elected. Leadership is more than everyone liking you.*

> *You shouldn't be a politician your whole life. We need to help people outside government to run for office...Elected officials think they must keep their jobs. We have to persuade them that there is life after elective office.*

> *The Citizens League should scare people: unless we improve the talent pool, we are on a downward slide. We need to be scared.*

"Chief executives"—the governor and mayor—have special leadership obligations, but Minnesota doesn't permit much authority in these offices. For example, the governor does not have a significant role in selecting regents for the University; the weak-mayor system in Minneapolis is a problem.

> *[To get real solutions to public problems], the leadership has to come from the senior elected official, the executive—whether governor or mayor. They're the ones with the bully pulpit, the relationship with the electorate, the capacity to make things happen. When you're elected mayor or governor, you're elected to be a leader. You have more latitude among voters, more opportunity to persuade.*

The state is evolving from an agrarian community to a megalopolis, but rural interests still dominate the legislature. Minnesota policy-making continues to be driven by rural concerns. The Legislature by political nature is driven toward geographical balance, which contributes to the tendency to spread public resources too thin on infrastructure and many other matters.

There has always been partisanship, but party positions have become more extreme and fragmented internally, and the willingness to work across party lines seems to have eroded. As the number of people who go to the caucuses and conventions has declined, endorsed candidates have ceased to represent the views of the community. The politicizing of local offices (school board, city council, county board) has been a disaster.

> *In politics there is polarization of the extreme. To get endorsed, you need to present yourself in a way that may not be in line with mainstream voters. In the "golden era" of the 1960s [with Durenberger, Elmer Andersen], things were different. Now party leaders have been replaced by people with strong agendas. Compromise is seen as disloyalty to the party.*

> *If I had my way we'd go back to a non-partisan legislature. Partisanship polarizes. If things were less partisan, more people would be attracted to serving in office.*

The issue of public-sector unions has to get "on the table."

> *The results of the decision to allow public employees to unionize has been atrocious.*

> *I don't see unions responding to the change to a service economy, or to new waves of immigrants. The issue of public education and the unions has to get on the table...The problem with unions is going to be worked out historically, however. No legislative attempt is likely to solve the problem.*

23

In the past, elected officials and appointees worked together, but now they often work at cross purposes or feel little common commitment. The demeaning process elected officials go through affects staff behavior. Staff assume that "this too shall pass" and learn to value safety over performance.

Minnesota needs to create more of a sense of policy leadership among public sector employees. The public should be concerned about the competence of leadership at all levels of government. Too many department heads have never been outside of government—but recruiting talented people from the private sector is hindered by low compensation.

> *Senior appointed officials can't be leaders. They're bag carriers. These are terrible jobs. They have to spend all their time figuring out what the legislature wants.*

> *Bureaucrats are embedded in the past. They're not open to new ideas. The fear of change requires a total turnover of top staff and elected officials to get anything done.*

THE LEADERSHIP GAP IN THE CIVIC AND BUSINESS SECTORS

Corporations and businesses are considerably less involved in the hard work of public policy than they once were. In the past, corporate leaders were very involved in civic matters. Now business leaders are unable or unwilling to take on public leadership challenges. The global pressure of business is consuming time. There is a continuing turnover of company leadership; most senior executives are from outside the Twin Cities and from a different corporate culture that doesn't value civic involvement as much.

Employers' expectations of civic and community involvement have diminished. Business people used to be given the message—spoken or unspoken—that they were to be involved with the Citizens League and other groups when they reached a certain position and pay range. Now people wait to be asked. And what many businesses view as "public involvement" has become more involved with philanthropy and public relations events than with key public issues.

> *I don't sense anymore the tie between the elected and appointed officials, and the private-sector leaders. It seems like the private sector sits back, and doesn't lean on the public officials. I don't feel large companies are including public problems in their priorities for time and resources.*

> *Less and less of [major Twin Cities companies'] business is right here in the Twin Cities. The CEOs of these companies live on airplanes. We can't change those conditions. We have to find another way to involve the corporate community that doesn't depend primarily upon the use of the CEO's time.*

> *Now a CEO has to be in 55 countries in 30 days. They don't have the time to spend on civic affairs. But they need to build a cadre of deputies that the political leadership can go to. It's now at too low a level. We have to find a substitute for the old days when a handful of people got together to get the job done.*

> *Public officials have to take the initiative to open the door to private-sector involvement. The vast majority of public officials are myopic. How can we encourage them to think big and take risks—even if it means possibly offending some people? Private-sector guys won't waste their time with something that will fail in the marketplace. The public sector should figure out how to tap profiteering as a motive that can serve the public good.*

Individuals are participating less in civic affairs. People are "cocooning." Membership in Rotary, Jaycees and similar groups is declining and isolationism is evident in everything from pop psychology to urban policy. Citizenship is construed as protecting our turf.

> We've lost the sense of how we come together to solve problems. I see lots of passion and new ideas. I see less understanding of how to really solve problems. It all degenerates into advocacy and finger pointing—"they need to be accountable to me."

> Some problems that seem intractable seem less so if you get up close. Somebody needs to say to people: Stop complaining and get involved.

> The general disengagement of citizens, the inability to trust leaders (or anybody) is largely the result of the maturing of the U.S. from an immigrant, rural society, through the remarkable economic boost after World War II. We're now having to deal with reality.

CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

A leader depends on a shared set of values, but in today's society there is little agreement about core values. The solution to many of the region's most important problems isn't a governmental solution. Improving education, for instance, depends on improving the behavior of parents, families, communities—in short, on improving the culture. But it is difficult today to address these value and culture concerns. The baby boom generation embraces an ethic of "do your own thing." The multiculturalist perspective holds that it's not proper to question someone's values or opinions, that each value or opinion is to be accepted as equally desirable. Some leaders are worried about where people are going and don't want to lead people where they want to go.

> A lot of the things that don't work in communities today are the result of transient behavior of various kinds. In business, in personal life, in communities—we're living in a culture where staying doesn't count for much. You're supposed to get up and move on. People think there's actually something wrong with you if you plan to stay. People are no longer prepared to spend 10 years doing things. It is widely accepted that leaders today will re-engineer things, then move on to something else; they aren't actually expected to stick around and be part of the enterprise.

> [We need to] develop a simple set of middle-class values to impart to young people, from when they're small children up to age 30. Baby boomers have inculcated their kids with a set of values—and have become teachers and ministers and are passing those same values on to other people's kids, too. The 60s values were to free up everybody to do whatever they want to do, without many responsibilities. The prevailing view is "who cares what happens to anybody else?" Today there isn't a solid core of values, so pressure groups have sprung up to promote their own idea of values. The result is fragmentation. A lot of people think you shouldn't teach values at all. [Question: Can you give examples of what you consider these core middle-class values? Answer: Responsibility, honesty, trustworthiness, respectfulness.]

> The [question for the Citizens League is]: What is the job of a leader when the culture is the problem?

A VISION FOR THE STATE AND REGION

There is no compelling vision of where the Twin Cities region should be heading. Nobody is dealing with the big picture. We need to build a new vision—three or four goals for the state and region, plus major systems to help us achieve them.

> *We [in the Twin Cities region] have lost our lust to be excellent.*

> *Minnesota is heading rudderless into the Brave New World.*

There is little sense that the individual communities of the Twin Cities metropolitan area add up to a regional community. The region has become balkanized and citizens and leaders alike have become more parochial. We don't have effective regional governance mechanisms to address the problems we share as an entire community. Both our thinking and our systems must change from local and parochial to regional. But because the region hasn't faced a crisis, or suffered in the way others have, there have been few unifying moments as a region.

> *There isn't much sense of regional citizenship, of common destiny. To most people, bad outcomes in Minneapolis don't mean we should do something about the problem—it means nobody in their right mind would live in Minneapolis.*

> *Fixing [problems such as urban sprawl] in today's paradigm would require an amazing degree of altruism on the part of individuals.*

FINDING, DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING LEADERS

People are afraid to lead today because of the brickbats. A puritanical and hypocritical public is asking for a standard of behavior in its leaders that it doesn't expect in itself. And the process of policy-making today is one that beats down rather than builds up.

> *The process by which you become an elected policy maker turns off many serious people. The fundraising groveling, deals cut and covered up, the loss of privacy and leisure time, the insularity and artificiality, the ego boosts provided by deferential supplicants. It's demanding. It's demeaning. Over time, you forget why you got into it in the first place.*

> *Some people would never consider public leadership because they could not take the personal attack. Women particularly. Women didn't learn how to try to kill your opponent, then go out for beer afterwards—that it's just part of the game. Women get hurt in the battle.*

Leadership today is often equated with passion about a specific issue of immediate self-interest. Some people think of themselves as leaders if they see a particular thing they're willing to work on for a short period until the immediate problem is solved or the demand is met—even though the result of their effort might not contribute to the public good. There aren't enough statespersons—people willing to ask mission and purpose questions that aren't self-interested.

> *People don't know how to be leaders anymore. It takes a strong sense of responsibility, the ability to anticipate and understand things and make judgments, the skill to articulate an issue so people can understand why it's important. And you have to know how to plan and actually do things. People won't take time to be leaders today unless something affects them personally.*

26

The practice of leadership requires disciplined self-examination, thought and analysis. To be a visionary leader, a person must examine what principles he is willing to work to exemplify, and reflect on what it is that will mark his civic commitment. Finding the time and space to reflect and debate and exercise one's analytical skills is difficult. And thinking in the abstract isn't enough; leaders' behavior has to reflect their principles.

> *Legislators face multiple role expectations: constituent service, policy leader, party leader, community leader, family member, and professional [in their other career]. Constituents expect their representatives to know about every issue the legislature deals with. The time demands are extreme, especially for those who do have careers outside the legislature. The time demands are a real obstacle to reading books and thinking.*

> *If you are a leader, your task is to help find a beacon light...[Leadership requires] character and integrity. There has to be congruence between what you say and how you live. The leader sets the tone for the whole enterprise. Is each individual going to start changing his or her own life? Without character and integrity, it's difficult for people to look at leaders with respect.*

The informal process of succession planning for the next generation of civic and government leaders has broken down. The community used to know "who to call," who the leaders were. Those people are now in their 60s and 70s. It's very unclear who the next generation of leaders will be.

The baby boomers may be a lost generation of leadership. They aren't stepping up to the responsibilities of community leadership, nor are they passing on values and expectations about public service to their children.

> *The baby boom generation may be hopeless. Expecting wisdom to come out of this generation?...I worry. We're running out of time. Maybe [the Citizens League] should skip a generation—not give up on them, but concentrate on bringing up the younger adults. There is hope for bringing them along.*

People have to be recruited into leadership, and that isn't happening as it should. There must be a more conscious effort to cultivate young adults as future leaders.

> *People have to experience the joy of leadership, of taking risks. There's some cultivation that has to take place among the next generation. Volunteer leadership is a building block process. You are asked to do some thing, you do it, have a success, and get asked again. How do we bring the 25- to 35-year olds into these issues?*

> *Sometimes only one person is identified as a leader [in a particular ethnic community], when more may exist. Leaders in the white community, in positions of power, end up defining leaders in communities of color by how they identify those leaders. We need much more outreach effort to broaden the leadership base in diverse communities.*

> *Some people go into public leadership for the right reasons, others don't. Shouldn't we identify those quietly behind the scenes who never ask for recognition—those who want to make a difference but don't care if they get credit?*

WHAT THE CITIZENS LEAGUE IS

The Citizens League promotes the public interest in Minnesota by involving citizens in identifying and framing critical public policy choices, forging recommendations and advocating their adoption.

The Citizens League has been an active and effective public affairs research and education organization in the Twin Cities metropolitan area for more than 40 years.

Volunteer research committees of League members study policy issues in depth and develop informational reports that propose specific workable solutions to public issues. Recommendations in these reports often become law. Over the years, League reports have been a reliable source of information for governmental officials, community leaders, and citizens concerned with public policy issues of our area.

The League depends upon the support of individual members and contributions from businesses, foundations, and other organizations throughout the metropolitan area.

CITIZENS LEAGUE
708 South 3rd Street
Suite 500
Minneapolis, MN 55415

Phone: 612-338-0791
FAX: 612-337-5919
email: info@citizensleague.net
www.citizensleague.net

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name _____ Home Phone

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code

Employer _____ Work Phone

Work Address _____ Work FAX

City _____ State _____ Zip Code

Email address _____

Spouse Information (If family membership)

Name _____

Employer _____ Work Phone

Work Address _____ Work FAX

City _____ State _____ Zip Code

Please ask your employer if the League qualifies for a matching grant from your company.

✔ **Membership level**

____	Donor	$1,000 and over
____	Sustaining	$500 - $999
____	Supporting	$200 - $499
____	Contributing	$100 - $199
____	***Family**	**$75**
____	**Individual**	**$50**
____	Student	$20
____	*Enclose what you can afford*	

✔ **Method of payment**

____ Check enclosed ____ Bill me

____ Visa/Mastercard ____ Discover

Card # _____

Exp. Date_____

* Family membership entitles you to a second *Minnesota Journal*. Please indicate the name and address of the second recipient.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Mail this form to: Citizens League
708 South 3rd St., Suite 500
Minneapolis, MN 55415

For more information:
call (612) 338-0791
or email info@citizensleague.net

How Can You Get Involved?

Being a member of the Citizens League says you care about what happens in Minnesota and believe that good policy depends on good information. League membership also gives you the opportunity to help shape public policy. League membership offers these additional benefits:

Minnesota Agenda - Study Committees

League members develop an understanding of issues and build solutions to problems. This League approach is nationally recognized as a model for citizen-based policy research.

Speak Ups! - Public Issues Face to Face

Small groups gather in member's homes for two-hour public policy discussions with a moderator to guide the process. Speak Ups! are designed for people who want to be involved but don't have time to spend on a study committee.

Citizens League On-Line

Visit our web site at www.citizensleague.net. The League home page includes excerpts from meetings, reports and the *Minnesota Journal*. It also includes a calendar of events and enables you to keep up with League committees and other activities.

Mind-Openers, Networks and other meetings

Breakfast and lunch meetings, after hours networking receptions and co-sponsored forums provide an informal setting for public officials, business and community leaders to discuss and debate timely issues.

Minnesota Journal & *Matters* Newsletter

Succinct coverage of public affairs issues and ideas for busy people. And updates on upcoming League meetings and other pertinent information.