



STATEMENT

**REGIONAL CHALLENGES
AND
REGIONAL GOVERNANCE**

**Public Affairs
research and education
in the Twin Cities
metropolitan area**



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Citizens League

Statement on

REGIONAL CHALLENGES AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

April 8, 1993

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CITIZENS LEAGUE STATEMENT ON REGIONAL CHALLENGES AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

Executive Summary

The Citizens League has reviewed the current debate on regional government and the League's 25-year history of studies, recommendations and statements on regional government. The League offers the following recommendations, observations and conclusions on regional challenges and governance. Further League analysis in this area is planned during 1993.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS ON REGIONAL GOVERNANCE:

- 1. Residents of the metropolitan area share many common interests and these should be articulated by a distinct regional entity.**
- 2. Challenges, problems and priorities in the region have expanded and shifted over the last 20 years.**
- 3. Stronger regional government is needed to mobilize a wide range of resources to accomplish regional goals.**
- 4. Metropolitan government should focus on vision, policy and strategy and avoid, whenever possible, being a direct service provider or managing details of regional functions.**
- 5. Redesigning metropolitan government will change the roles and functions of local governments in the metropolitan region.**
- 6. Regional government should be flexible, designing suitable governing and management structures for different functions.**
- 7. Achieving regional consensus and vision depends on regional government having strong and effective leadership, functions relevant to the problems confronting the region, and adequate authority.**

RECOMMENDATIONS ON REGIONAL GOVERNANCE:

The Citizens League recommends that the Governor and Legislature:

Establish a blue ribbon interim Commission on Metropolitan Affairs, made up of appointees of the Governor, House and Senate, to report back to the 1994 Legislature on the following charge:

- **Identify, as part of the process of clarifying the legislative vision for regional government, priority areas and deadlines for action to address regional challenges.**
- **Recommend on an agency by agency basis the budget and control relationships between the regional government and operating agencies with the aim of improving accountability and coherence with overall regional objectives.**
- **Review the powers of the Metropolitan Council and the authority needed by regional government to achieve regional objectives.**
- **Lay out a framework for the election of the Metropolitan Council, the central policy making body of the region.**

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Citizens League believes that the debate on the Metropolitan Council should start by questioning what the region needs now and by identifying appropriate regional responses to these needs. The League recognizes the need for greater emphasis on the problems of geographic concentration of poverty, housing and educational concerns as part of the broad physical, economic and social well-being of the region. We believe that a regional entity is needed to address these challenges by developing public policy, devising regional strategies and catalyzing action both by other levels of government and by non-governmental actors. The Citizens League recommendations on regional governance were informed by the following seven key observations and conclusions.

- 1. Residents of the metropolitan area share many common interests and these should be articulated by a distinct regional entity.** Communities across the metropolitan area share many common interests, resources, values and aspirations. Many needs and issues, such as growing poverty and housing quality, do not respect local boundaries. Clearly, there is a need for a viable regional forum to argue out these issues and problems, to determine how to address them and to set in place strategies to remedy problems. Properly revitalized, the Metropolitan Council might continue to be that entity to address regional issues in the coming years.
- 2. Priorities in the region have expanded and shifted over the last 20 years.** The Metropolitan Council has provided a strong resource for physical infrastructure planning and development since it was created. But the League believes that the challenges -- as reflected in citizen concerns -- have shifted to include poverty, public safety, health care, education and economic development. An appropriate regional entity must be able to orchestrate a credible response to these challenges.
- 3. A strong regional government is needed to bring a wide range of resources -- physical, personnel and financial -- to deal with regional needs.** The scope of these problems is beyond the capacity of individual municipal or county governments. Region-wide resources and strategies are required to address these needs. To carry out these responsibilities, the regional government should have three key powers: taxing authority for the areas outlined as the regional entity's responsibility by the Legislature; the ability to shift resources as appropriate and the power to impose sanctions on local governments which do not meet their responsibilities.
- 4. Metropolitan government should avoid being a direct service provider but should largely be a vision, policy and strategy entity.** We do not support giving the Metropolitan Council additional responsibility for operational details, since that will likely come at the expense of attending to vision and regional strategy development. Metropolitan government should be responsible for planning overall strategy but not the detailed management required to actually run a program or service. Metropolitan government should be the key regional entity for public policy development and facilitation. It must articulate the regional interest, set key policies and priorities and develop effective implementation strategies. To concentrate its efforts, it must avoid, where feasible, being a service provider. Regional strategies to

address the new priorities need not require new bureaucratic operating authorities. As strategies are developed, functional differentiation among governments (both local and regional) should be examined, looking at each service to determine who should handle it.

5. **Redesigning metropolitan government will change the roles and functions of local governments in the metropolitan region.** No one government can address all problems. Some governments may not have as much power following a redesign of regional governance but other entities, such as neighborhoods, may be given additional responsibilities. It should be the issue that determines which government should handle a challenge rather than current or past practice. In addition, collaboration and consolidation among governments is happening now, and redesign of regional government and its relationships could change the nature of this development.
6. **Regional government should be flexible while designing different structures to meet the challenges of different functions.** The different ways in which the Council now relates to the operating agencies can be a strength. At the same time, there must be effective links between the Metropolitan Council and the regional agencies so that the plans and policies developed by the Council are adopted and carried out by the agencies.
7. **Both strong and effective leadership and strong functions and authority for regional government are needed to pull together and design a regional vision and build consensus around it.** As one part of an overall effort to strengthen regional responses to regional needs, the Citizens League continues to stand for an elected Metropolitan Council. Since the Citizens League's first report in March of 1967, which recommended the creation of the Metropolitan Council, the League has advocated election of Council members by popular vote. Elections energize the public debate, make the government more visible, more assertive and over time should help to define a vision for the region.

REGIONAL VISION, STRATEGIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Much of the debate on regional government would appear to respond to three main questions:

- **Vision:** How do we establish a regional vision of where we want to be that reflects key challenges, goals and broad themes emerging in the region?
- **Strategies:** How do we establish and implement regional strategies to address pressing regional needs (a) without creating excessive central bureaucracy and (b) while assuring a reasonable likelihood that prudent measures that might be unpopular with some other governmental units can be achieved?
- **Accountability:** How do we ensure reasonable accountability for the hundreds of millions of dollars that regional agencies spend and that these funds are expended in a fashion that is coherent with overall regional objectives?

VISION

The key responsibilities of the Legislature, as the body with the power to create and shape the regional government, are to provide the regional government with a clear set of goals for its attention, devise broad themes for the regional government to emphasize in a broad portfolio of possible activities and provide rigorous oversight of the performance of the regional agency.

The League believes that clarifying the regional vision and goals should precede wholesale redesign of governmental structure. Structure should be designed to support the long-range implementation of the vision for the region. To accomplish the task of specifying broad goals and themes for regional government to address, we recommend that the Legislature:

Recommendation: Establish a blue ribbon interim Commission on Metropolitan Affairs, made up of appointees of the Governor, House and Senate, to report back to the 1994 legislature with recommendations for priority areas for action. They would make a major contribution to clarifying the legislative vision for regional government. The majority of the appointees to the Commission should be general citizens. The tasks would include: identifying a defined set of high priority issue areas for action by the regional government, setting a timeline for performance and a format for oversight in these areas and identifying a broad set of potential implementation strategies for accomplishing regional goals.

Based on a renewed legislative framework, the Metropolitan Council might appropriately establish opportunities to mobilize citizen input to develop a more detailed vision for the region. The Council might establish, for example, a commission to articulate a regional vision on economic development. Such a process should be broadly based and made up of

recognized leaders from many sectors of the region to get the best available thinking and to build consensus. On a periodic basis, the Metropolitan Council might create a vision group to review trends, hold public hearings and to identify areas requiring priority attention.

STRATEGIES

Once a regional vision has been established, the Metropolitan Council should devise implementation strategies to achieve that vision. These strategies would be implemented through regional operating agencies, local units of government and others, including nonprofit agencies.

The Council would present its visions and strategies to the Legislature and request whatever additional authority it needed to carry out the strategies. Legislative support for regional goals and strategies is crucial. While the Legislature needs to devise an ongoing system to focus oversight on regional government, it must also resist the temptation to manage the regional government in detail. An important issue is whether the regional government has sufficient powers to achieve regional objectives or whether additional powers may be needed. The League recommends that:

The interim Commission on Metropolitan Affairs review the powers of the Metropolitan Council and the authority needed by regional government to achieve regional objectives.

A fundamental review of present regional strategies and the needs for new regional strategies in light of the new vision would be appropriate at this time. The initial work to develop effective and efficient strategies might well be done by the best available talent in particular fields of work and study. It is important that the strategies be cutting-edge and innovative to respond to the complex dynamics both of the challenges and of governing efficiently and effectively in the coming decades. The Metropolitan Council should be challenged to be innovative and to go beyond traditional implementation strategies. Regional government, in summary, should draw upon state-of-the-art expertise in devising innovative and cutting-edge implementation strategies to arrive at the most creative and effective solutions for the region.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Regional operating agencies spend hundreds of millions of dollars per year with little direct oversight or authorization from elected decision makers. Devising and implementing a new vision for the region requires improved accountability, both outside and within regional government. It is very important, however, that this effort be done within the context of a clear set of identified regional needs and goals.

External Accountability.

To enhance accountability, the Metropolitan Council should be elected. We believe that an elected Metropolitan Council is a necessary -- though clearly not sufficient -- condition to ensure that the Council has the political muscle, visibility and public accountability needed to build a vision and see it through. An elected Council would have more clout in the intensely

political atmosphere of intergovernmental relations. The current structure, with its layers of appointees, is inherently weak. In moving to an elected Council, many questions remain to be answered. The League recommends that:

The interim Commission on Metropolitan Affairs be charged with recommending a specific set of steps, structures and frameworks for election of the Metropolitan Council, the central policy making body of the region.

Suggested areas for recommendations include: Nomination requirements for candidates to run for office, campaign finance mechanisms, full- or part-time status, compensation, length of terms, staggering of terms, at-large or district-based seats and a method for selection of the chair of the regional government.

To build confidence in its performance, the Metropolitan Council will need to report information and results to the voters and to the Legislature. A useful companion step would be for the legislature to review the scope, form and frequency of its oversight over metropolitan regional affairs.

Internal Accountability.

To improve internal accountability within regional government, structures are needed for regional government and operating agencies that: (1) reduce the number of layers of appointed officials with policy making authority and operating responsibilities, specifically in the area of transit; (2) align the Council and the regional operating agencies in devising and implementing coherent regional strategies; and (3) promote operating efficiency by the regional agencies. It is unlikely that one accountability model will be appropriate for all regional agencies.

Recommendation: We recommend that the interim Commission on Metropolitan Affairs review and recommend on an agency by agency basis appropriate budget and control relationships between the regional government and the regional operating agencies, with the aim of improving accountability and coherence. The Commission should take into account a variety of factors in making its recommendations including size, scope of authority, maturity of the service or program and relationship to the Council.

References

Citizens League. (1967). A Metropolitan Council for the Twin Cities Area.

Citizens League (1984) The Metro Council: Narrowing the agenda and raising the stakes.

Citizens League (1989). The Metropolitan Council: Strengthening its leadership role.

WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

CHARGE TO THE COMMITTEE

Preamble

Some 25 years ago, based on a perception of a regional community and regional needs, the Metropolitan Council was created. The regional needs of the 1960s have given way to a new set of pressing issues which include physical infrastructure but which also include more social concerns. Recent statistics show that more than half of the children in our largest city live in poverty. This poverty is growing in some parts of our region even as other parts are making economic progress. These and other factors such as urban sprawl and job creation in more outlying areas suggest a new look at our regional governance structures.

Issues/Tasks:

1. The committee should synthesize recent work on metropolitan governance issues, including the reports of the Association of Metropolitan Municipalities, the League of Women Voters, the Legislative Auditor and the Citizens League.
2. The committee should consider proposals that will be presented to the 1993 session and update or develop League positions on those issues. Currently, bills that propose these changes are:
 - Give the Council additional responsibilities and powers to address key regional issues, such as the concentration of poverty in the core cities and first-ring suburbs or policies that seem to favor infrastructure investment and job development on the regional edge.
 - Change the structure of metropolitan agencies, so that the Council is a political subdivision with several operating divisions.
 - Elect the members of the Council directly by the voters.
3. In addition to studying these proposals and others, the committee should also identify fundamental policy issues affecting the region and its population.
4. The committee should consider whether the region would be better served by deferring action on some of the legislative proposals in favor of some sort of study process. In particular, it should consider the view that it is more important to identify fundamental issues of regional goals and challenges, reach consensus on how to approach those issues and then to address the structure of regional governance. In considering delay by the Legislature, it should acknowledge the urgency of problems that have been identified and consider the political implications of deferring action. The committee acknowledges the urgency of the problems, but in light of the sweeping nature of some changes recommended, the Legislature should take time to think through unintended consequences. There must also be an impetus for the changes.

5. The committee should identify a process for a legislatively mandated study of these fundamental policy issues which would attract a high caliber of public figures and would focus legislative and public attention on these issues. It should also identify tools that would underscore the importance of these issues and would press the Governor, the Legislature and local governments to work together to address these issues.
6. The committee should develop the framework for a larger study on these issues drawing upon the lessons learned, the barriers identified and the future goals outlined in the ideas developed for the legislature.

Regional Challenges and Regional Governance Committee

The members of the Committee were: Chair, *Bill Johnstone*, Partner, Dorsey and Whitney; *Justice Sandra Gardebring*, Supreme Court of Minnesota and former chair of the Metropolitan Council; *Joe Gasper*, Purchasing Manager, 3M Company; *Ruby Hunt*, Commissioner, Ramsey County; *Amy Klobuchar*, Attorney, Dorsey and Whitney; *Barbara Lukermann*, Senior Fellow, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and Director of Planning Programs; *David Rodbourne*, consultant and co-chair of the Citizens League Program Strategy committee; *Donald G. Scheel*, former Washington County commissioner; *Bill Schreiber*, assistant to the Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Transportation and former House Minority Leader; *Clarence Shallbetter*, public policy consultant; *Judge Richard Solum*, Hennepin County District Court; and *Gertrude Ulrich*, community activist and former Metropolitan Council member.

The committee met nine times between February 25, 1993 and April 7, 1993. The statement was approved by the Citizens League Board April 8, 1993.

The following individuals acted as resource people for the Committee: *John Adams*, University of Minnesota; Representative *Phil Carruthers*, Brooklyn Center; Mayor *Don Fraser*, City of Minneapolis; *Michael Munson*, Metropolitan Council; Representative *Myron Orfield*, Minneapolis

The following Citizens League staff worked on this statement: *Marilou Fallis*, research associate, prepared and provided the research for this statement. *Lyle Wray*, executive director, and *Allan Baumgarten*, associate director, developed the final language for the statement. *Dawn Latulippe* and *Joann Latulippe* provided administrative support to the committee.

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Minnesota Managed Care Review 1993 is a valuable "report card" for consumers and others who need to keep up with Minnesota's dynamic health care marketplace. League members can buy the report for \$15.00; the nonmember price is \$20.00. Discounts are available for multiple copy orders. To order your copies, please use the enclosed form or call the League at (612) 338-0791.

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The book features information about each school's curriculum, foreign languages, building and facilities, extracurricular activities, number of students and teachers, class size, use of technology, grading system, parent organizations and communications, and services such as latchkey and breakfast. Each school profile includes a self-description of the school's teaching philosophy and strengths.

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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. *For membership information, please call 612/338-0791.*

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