

★ EDITORIAL

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Star

A government of governments?

CHARLES Weaver is the first Metropolitan Council chairman openly to oppose making the council an elected body. But no chairman ever has offered a better (albeit unintended) case for an elected council than did Weaver in the face-to-face interview with him published in last Saturday's Star magazine.

What Weaver said was that he feels "very strongly that the council is working for local units of government" and that it is enough, in effect, that the people elect their local officers. Only if the council gained independent taxing power, he said, would he support election.

It was a disturbing statement because it indicated that Weaver's opposition to an elected council arises out of a more basic, and we believe mistaken, view of what the council's role and responsibilities are. It works, he said, for local units of government. If that were so, then Weaver would be right about election. As Ronald Cease, a political science professor at Portland State University, said in a Star Opinion Page article last week about the Portland, Ore., area's recent venture into elected metropolitan governance, "if local government is

viewed as the constituency, then there's no reason for election."

But local government is not the council's constituency, at least not the main one. Local governments need to be served at the regional level, to be sure. And so does the state Legislature, which created the council and still holds its purse strings. But the structure of the Metropolitan Council—with its districts mostly crossing traditional political boundaries and with its members being appointed on a one-man, one-vote basis—strongly suggests that it was the area's people who were primarily to be represented, who were to be given a voice for their metropolitan citizenship that was separate and distinct from the well-established voices they already had as local, state and national citizens.

The concept of metropolitan citizenship is neither deeply felt nor widely understood. But it exists for all of us in much the same way that all of us are Minnesota citizens at the same time we are citizens of the United States. And if the Metropolitan Council doesn't represent our metropolitan citizenship as distinct from our local citizenships in such areas of potential conflict as transportation, environmental protection and land development, who will?

It has been said that the issue is whether the Metropolitan Council will be "a government of governments or a government of people." To have the council's own chairman seeming to argue for the former indicates that the appointed council's drift away from being a government of people has gone far enough and that the time has come for election to bring it back.

—Charles Whiting
for The Minneapolis Star.

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