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Report By the Boards of Governors on the Admission of Women to the City Club of Portland

City Club of Portland (Portland, Or.)

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**REPORT
BY THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS
ON THE
ADMISSION OF WOMEN
TO THE CITY CLUB OF PORTLAND**

To the Members,
The City Club of Portland:

The question before us is whether Article II, Section 1., a. of our Club Constitution shall be amended as indicated below to remove what has been considered a bar to the admission of women to membership. The specific amendment is as follows:

Article II—Purposes

Section 1. The purposes of this organization shall be:

- a. To provide a common meeting ground for congenial, forward-looking [men] *persons* of divergent beliefs, politics and occupations, for the interchange of ideas and stimulation of intelligent thinking on civic matters.

(Bracketed material to be deleted, italicized to be added.)

I. MAJORITY REPORT

Promptly after their nominations were announced, and even before taking office, the members of the present Board of Governors were urged to reconsider the question of admission of women to membership. The requests for reconsideration have been in such number that your Board felt it should constitute itself as a committee to study the matter and report its recommendations.

It is the conclusion of a majority of your Board of Governors that women should be admitted to membership.

In its deliberations, your Board reviewed the history of the club, examining such documents as are available. We looked into the operation of similar clubs in other communities, particularly those which have recently changed their policies so to admit women. A number of solicited and unsolicited comments were received from members, both in writing and orally. After appropriate public announcement, your Board held two hearings for the purpose of receiving statements from interested members and persons from the community. Twenty-eight persons made oral statements in favor of change; three in opposition. A great many letters were received from supporters of both points of view. The arguments which were advanced are summarized below. Their order of presentation is not intended necessarily to reflect their relative importance to your Board.

II. ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF CHANGE

1. There are many women who, by reason of education, talent and/or business and professional experience, could make a valuable contribution to the City Club and to its goal of community betterment.
2. It will make more directly available to the Club the view and perceptions of a major segment of our population and make the Club more representative of the community it serves.
3. We cannot remain the "Conscience of the City" and deny women membership.
4. Discrimination on the basis of sex has no more validity than discrimination by reason of race or religion.

5. Women should not be denied the contacts that membership in the City Club provides.
6. The Club's reputation has been damaged by its refusal to admit women.
7. Desirable speakers will refuse platform appearances if the policy is not changed.
8. Many members have declared their intention to resign if the policy is not changed.
9. The Club has an obligation to set a good example.

III. ARGUMENTS AGAINST CHANGE

1. The City Club has had a successful format and it should not be changed.
2. The admission of women would change the character of the Club.
3. The membership is large enough and does not require the addition of women.
4. There are other clubs available to women who are interested in studying civic problems.
5. The "men only" atmosphere at lunches should be preserved.
6. Men need the all-male refuge provided by the City Club.

Your Board has attempted to weigh all the arguments presented on both sides of the question. A majority feels the arguments in favor of the admission of women heavily outweigh the arguments in favor of restricting membership.

The majority likewise feels that it is essential that this matter be put to a vote and that women be admitted to the Club as promptly as possible, so that the Club can put this controversy behind it and proceed with the important tasks before it. To this end, your Board has considered a number of procedural options, ranging from direct Board action to constitutional amendment. For the reasons suggested below, the majority of your Board believes that the most desirable solution at this time is for the Club to muster its strength and to give the required two-thirds majority to a constitutional amendment, which will resolve the matter beyond any lingering dispute.

IV. THE MERITS OF THE ISSUE

The City Club exists as something more than a social club. We are impressed with the Club's long history of dedicated service to our community, and we are convinced that the City Club occupies a special niche in both the history and the current affairs of Portland. As trustees for the Club, we have tried to concern ourselves primarily with the question of how best to benefit the Club and to enable it to continue as an effective, forceful community organization. A majority of your Board can find no adequate reason for denying the City Club the talents of the many capable women of our community. We have also been mindful of the sensitivities of many of the women in our community. Neither logic nor emotion supports denying membership purely because of sex to a United States Senator, a member of the House of Representatives, a Mayor elected principally as a result of a report of this Club, a judge, or any number of capable, intelligent and successful women. Given the problems confronting our society, we need all the help we can get.

In the first Bulletin of the City Club, published October 1, 1920, Robert E. Rankin, one of the founders, wrote:

"Our environment more and more compels us to lead lives narrowed by the demands of our business, and reflect without much personal consideration, the prejudices and conclusions of those of even less ability or greater specialization. Our Club must keep us broad in our vision and tolerant in our attitude.

"The causes which give rise to such an organization must force on us the consideration of the community's problem, not that of the individual. With the collective ability of the membership, the Club should accomplish its great

ideal—that of thoroughly, broadly and unselfishly determining what is necessary and proper with respect to particular problems arising in Portland's municipal affairs, then ally itself on the side of greatest permanent benefit to the City's interests. Ultimately this stand will be appreciated by the municipal citizens and those who have neither time nor inclination personally to determine their position, will confidently turn to the assistance of the City Club.

"Our Club must stand for true democracy and exemplify its position by being democratic. This does not mean we must encumber our ideal with the drone of the reactionary. They do not trend to the confidence and responsibility we must secure and assume."

If the City Club is to continue with this spirit, the majority of your Board feels that we must move immediately to admit women.

Some of those opposed to opening membership to women have contended that it would change the character of the Club and that they would feel less comfortable at the Friday luncheons with women present. As to the former fear, we can only refer to the experience of Los Angeles' Town Hall and San Francisco's Commonwealth Club, both having recently opened their rolls to women. Their Presidents (one of whom originally supported, the other originally opposed, a change in policy) have reported that the change has worked well in each instance. As to the latter fear, we should note that the change in policy has resulted in a relatively small number of applications. Town Hall has between 300-400 women out of 6,000 members; Commonwealth about 200 out of 14,000.

Rest assured that the majority position is taken not because of the recent publicity and other efforts to disrupt our activities, but rather in spite of them. Indeed, some of the more vocal women advocates for change have indicated that they would not join the City Club even if membership were available to them. However, they do not want membership denied to others of their sex who do want to join.

Instead, our concern has been to determine the course we think will best benefit the Club. While we recognize that the Club might possibly continue as a viable institution in its present form, we believe that it is foolish to continue a policy that denies the City Club and the community it seeks to serve the added wisdom, the possibly different viewpoints, the energies and vigor, and the added numbers which would flow from admission of women to the City Club.

A number of members have informally indicated that although they were initially opposed to the admission of women, they have, after reflection, changed their view and feel the policy of the Club should be revised. Indeed, given the intervening drastic change in the status of women, a majority of your Board feels that today the founders of the City Club would offer opportunity of membership to women as well as men.

The City Club is today the only Club of its type in a major western city which excludes women from its membership. The majority of your Board believes that the time has come to change this policy, and we wholeheartedly and unequivocally recommend to the membership that women be admitted forthwith.

V. PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS

Earlier this year, the question of admitting women to the City Club was presented to the membership by the previous Board of Governors. At that time the matter was referred to the members without benefit of the advice or recommendation of the Board. Many of the members of the Club, including some of the present members of the Board, were at that time lukewarm, if not opposed, to the admission of women. At that time, it was assumed by many that the language of the City Club Constitution expressly prohibited the admission of women to the Club. Accordingly, the question presented and considered at that time was whether the Club Constitution should be amended to permit the admission of women. Under the Club's Constitution, and under Oregon law, a constitutional amendment requires the approval of two-thirds of those present at the voting meeting.

Since announcing its intention to re-study the issue, your Board has received a number of suggestions concerning the procedure to be followed in resolving the matter. In particular, several members have suggested that the Club Constitution does not, on its face, preclude the admission of women and that the use of the word "men" in the statement of the organization's purposes should be interpreted in its generic sense to mean "mankind". These individuals have suggested that the Board admit women, and if there is resulting objection, the matter could be determined by a majority of the Club. Other persons have suggested that the Board call for a majority vote on the question of interpreting the Club Constitution.

Your Board has carefully considered these arguments. Another factor which has been carefully considered is that many of the members who have expressed themselves as opposing the admission of women have nevertheless stated they are prepared to abide by the majority decision on the question. Their point of view is commendably consistent with the democratic origins and purposes of the Club.

At the same time, we are faced with a long history of the City Club as a "men only" institution, which cannot be lightly ignored, whatever ambiguities there may be in the words of the Club Constitution.

With this background, and because the issue of the admission of women is so emotionally charged, your Board has decided not to attempt the task of constitutional interpretation.

Instead, we hope that substantially more than two-thirds of the membership will recognize the importance of removing all vestiges of discrimination from our Club, and that the issue can be resolved authoritatively and finally, beyond any lingering dispute.

Accordingly, the majority of your Board herewith submits to the membership a proposed constitutional amendment, to remove from the Constitution any suggestion that women be excluded from membership.

Many members have urged that this issue be submitted to a mail vote in order to secure as large a vote as possible. Such a procedure is precluded by reason of Article VIII of the Club Constitution which requires amendment of the Constitution to be by vote of those present at the meeting. Moreover, it is in keeping with the well-founded City Club tradition that issues be voted upon in open meeting after full debate.

VI. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated, a majority of your Board of Governors recommends that Article I, Section 1. a. of the Club Constitution be amended to read as follows:

Article II — Purposes

Section 1. The purposes of this organization shall be:

- a. To provide a common meeting ground for congenial, forward-looking [men] *persons* of divergent beliefs, politics and occupations, for the interchange of ideas and stimulation of intelligent thinking on civic matters.

(Bracketed material to be deleted, italicized to be added.)

The proposed constitutional amendment will be presented to the membership for action on October 29, 1971. We urge that each member of the Club give the question full and careful consideration prior to that date. On that date, we are hopeful that a great majority of the membership, and certainly more than two-thirds, will stand up and be counted in favor of this significant and important change.

At the same time, we note the expression of many of the members, with feelings pro and con, that the view of the majority should control on this question.

In keeping with this spirit, if a majority less than two-thirds should this time vote in favor of the admission of women, the Board urges other members to consider whether they might not wish to cast or change their vote to favor admitting women, so that the Club will in fact reflect the majority's view.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Ater
John H. Buttler
Gerald L. Cogan
Walter Gordon
R. H. Huntington
Myron Katz
Kenneth S. Klarquist
Sidney I. Lezak
E. Kimbark MacColl
James A. Miller

MINORITY REPORT

A minority of the current City Club Board of Governors feels it to be highly undesirable to change the current practice of encouraging only men to be members of the City Club. We join with the majority in deploring the fact that this item has demanded so much attention of both a past Board and the current Board. This attention has been diverted from other matters that could have beneficially received their consideration, and we hope now that the matter is being reconsidered that it will be for the final time.

There are many issues of civic and public matters that the City Club has faced in the past. The issue as now drawn here concerning women membership is no less important than any of the past ones because it has a major effect on the type of organization that the City Club will become. It will not be the same City Club as it has been in the past, and hence this Board and this membership are faced with a decision that will definitely change the course of the Club.

We believe it is not possible to determine whether that course would be improved or blemished by the change. We do believe that the role of the City Club in the past has been clearly identified by its actions, and that the City of Portland has accepted the City Club in this role as a result of years of activities and policies adopted by the City Club itself. The personality of the future City Club is the thing we are talking about here: Whether we do or do not want to change it. We oppose the change for the following reasons:

1. We feel enlarging the City Club on a broad scale will open up the very possibility of its becoming a pressure group and a political weapon of such attractiveness as to be a major target of control by dedicated small groups. This is diametrically opposite from the past image that has been developed, an image of integrity, reliability, objectivity, and complete dedication to attempt to analyze some of the ills of our society so that society may better understand itself, but not to become a weapon to be wielded in an attempt to change that society.

2. We do not believe the City Club exists for the benefit of making contacts by members, one with another. We believe the City Club exists for the purpose of developing factual information relevant to our society. It does not exist solely for the benefit of educating members themselves, but exists also for the purpose of creating a source from which society itself can be educated if it so desires. An enlarged, diverse group potentially alters this picture.

3. In past years, the City Club has always been a much sought-after mecca as a platform by speakers of all interests, capabilities and outlooks. Only very recently as a result of the considered efforts of special interest groups, has ever the thought been raised that speakers would not eagerly grasp the opportunity of speaking to the organization. An enlarged group, including small active cells, could possibly find new specific narrow interests to develop to cause turmoil, doubt, and uncertainty among potential speakers.

4. The City Club, over the years, has had and taken advantage of the views, wisdom, energies and vigor of all nationalities, religious and political groups, including both sexes, through its unique research committee technique. It has also gained recognition through its efforts to seek out and encourage speakers of both sexes and all divergent views. Through this process it gained the status of being considered the "Conscience of the City" rather than through a membership proportion based on race, religion, sex or creed.

5. The purpose of the City Club, as stated in Article II of its Constitution, is to provide a common meeting ground for congenial, forward-looking men of divergent beliefs, politics and occupations, for the interchange of ideas and stimulation of intelligent thinking on civic matters and to arouse in them an appreciation of the obligations of citizenship.

Thaddeus W. Veness, an attorney, a charter member of the City Club and one of the original composers of the Constitution has stated that the Club was originally established to be all male in gender and if any intention to include women had existed it would have been so stated in the original document.

6. If present members do not feel that a dedicated group of like-minded compatible individuals has a right to meet together to consider matters of civic interest, then they should feel free to resign. The City Club has no right to deny those people their freedom of choice of resigning and joining some other group with which they would feel more satisfied.

7. The City Club has an obligation to continue its record of integrity, solidarity, reliability, and its objectiveness as demonstrated by its not being beholden to any one group or swayed by a concerted effort of a vested interest. It has never allowed this to happen in the past and should not allow it to happen presently.

Because of these seven specific items, and because of other general thoughts related to personal freedom and resistance to recrimination, and not at all related to any slight thought concerning comparative capabilities and intelligence which comparison we reject as not applicable at all, we urge that the Club continue its present established membership policies.

Respectfully submitted,
Don Chapman
William H. Gregory