

WHAT IF WOMEN RULED

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What if women ran



Attorney Karen Conti, shown Wednesday outside her office at 100 N. La Salle, polled powerful female pals to learn how they'd change the city if they were in charge. BY JOHN H. WHITE-SUN-TIMES

PONDERING POWER | City's female elite give their visions of reigns and gains

BY PAIGE WISER
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Nobody is giving women power — but we're taking it anyway. By this time next year, there's a good chance we'll have a woman in the White House (who

doesn't have "secretary" in her title). A woman has already been named chancellor of Germany, and Spain's government is female-dominated. Next stop: world domination. But what would Chicago be like with women in charge? Here's a glimpse of what could be:

'WE'D SHED OUR SECOND CITY STATUS'

Karen Conti, partner of the law office Adamski & Conti and host of "Legally Speaking" on WGN-AM (720), says:

As an attorney of the persuasive female persuasion, I know that women approach almost everything — including dispute resolution — differently than men. Unless unduly or unfairly provoked, we are more collaborative, less combative and better listeners. While I was in an unusually fine listening and collaborative mood, I called upon several ruling women for their opinions on how Chicago would be different if women were in charge.

Justice Anne Burke, the robed ruler on the Illinois Supreme Court, believes that "if women were at the city's helm, family issues would be addressed as a priority and more creatively." Take school hours ending at 3 p.m. Women are largely strapped with the pick-up/drop-off duties, and this puts a huge burden on them. Burke asks, "What woman has a job that



Anne Burke



Judy Baar Topinka

ends at 3?" Women would see to it that all schools either change their hours or provide quality after-school programs that keep kids off the streets and out of their parents' hair until they can be appropriately rounded up and corralled.

Illinois' brassiest and sassiest recently retired ruler, Judy Baar Topinka, had plenty to say about how the city would be different. Quoth Judy, "There's too much testosterone out there trying to prove itself." While acknowledging that women do have egos, she thinks that they can accept loss better than men and are more will-

ing to share power. Women routinely seek out win-win situations because "there are no great shakes in declaring a winner in everything."

Brenda Mauldin, one of Chicago's rulers of real estate, said there would be no difference if women were in control of our city. Why? Mauldin observes that the city's beautiful trees, flowers and fancy lampposts make it obvious that Mayor Daley is already in touch with his feminine side. Either that or Maggie rules him and the city with an iron (and well-manicured) fist!

When I e-mailed my employees with this query, my associate attorney Samantha Engel responded without hesitation: "There wouldn't be a sidewalk grate in the city that would allow a high heel to pass through."

My own thoughts? If I ruled Chicago, I'd use all of my collaborative powers to shake that whole Second City thing and demand our rightful place once and for all!

'STOP BUILDING THOSE UGLY CONDOS'

Sally Timms, singer and songwriter best known for her work with the Mekons, says:

Would anything change? Not judging by current patterns, in my opinion. There's an assumption, almost exclusively held by women, that if we ran things the world would be a kinder, better place and we would never show the same degree of naked ambition and cruelty as our male counterparts.

But in politics we haven't proved ourselves any better or worse than the men.

Hillary Clinton voted in favor of the invasion of Iraq. Condoleezza Rice showed no compassion during Hurricane Katrina, and Chicago alderwomen are equally open to corruption as men.

In my opinion, anyone, regardless of gender, who shows a strong interest in public office should automati-

cally be barred from applying. Then we might see some changes.

So for the sake of argument, here's how this woman would run Chicago if she were feeling at her most nurturing and design-aware:

◆ I would immediately stop the ugly condo developments that are decimating Chicago's charm.

◆ I would support pay raises and improved condi-

things in Chicago?



'MEN WOULD WEAR HEELS AND SKIRTS'

Laura Berman, director of the Berman Center, is a sex educator, therapist, and columnist for the Sun-Times. She says:

If women ruled Chicago, we would come up with a type of road salt that wouldn't stain Uggs and ruin the bottoms of black pants. Men would be the ones who would have to dress inappropriately for the weather in heels and skirts, while women would bundle up in warm suits and thick coats.

Women would also be able to freely discuss and discover their own sexual pleasure, without fear of being judged or called nasty names.

If women ruled Chicago,

body hair would become a sign of beauty in a woman — but men would be required to get monthly Brazilians!

If women ruled Chicago, the Chicago River would be dyed pink on May 31 and June 1 to celebrate the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer and to remember all of the brave women who have battled this disease.

If women ruled Chicago, comprehensive sex education would be taught in our schools so that the younger generation of women could learn about their anatomy and sexual health, along with receiving information about practice safer sex.



'TEACH SCHOOLKIDS ABOUT FINANCE'

Melody Hobson, the president of Ariel Investments, says:

I don't want to make any generalizations regarding gender. Leadership is specific to the person, not the gender. I believe in focus, and I can tell you what I would do if I were in charge.

My idea is that every school in Chicago would have a financial literacy program. We already have one in place at Ariel Community Academy in the North Kenwood neighborhood.

We give 20,000 real dollars to each first-grade class, and over time, they take over increasing responsibility for managing its portfolio. When they graduate, they give \$20,000 back to the incom-

ing first-grade class, so that it's self-perpetuating.

At Ariel, we take financial literacy very seriously. The days of working for a company for 30 years and retiring with a gold watch are over. 401Ks have replaced traditional pension funds. And since those plans are self-directed, it's extraordinarily important to be financially literate.

If women were in charge, would they invest differently? Studies show that women tend to be more patient and conservative as investors. Men tend to trade more and take more risk, which can lead to higher returns. They get more bang for the buck.

'FIGHT TOUGH LIKE THEY DO AT TARGET'



Second City's Emily Wilson (center) says women are just as good in scandals.

Emily Wilson, comedian in the cast of the current Second City show "No Country for Old White Men," says:

Is it me, or is there something offensive about asking what would happen if a woman ran things? The question itself makes it seem like the notion of a woman in charge is preposterous, like what would happen if an aloe plant ran a Fortune 500 company? Or a monkey ran the White House? OK, the last example, while preposterous, is actually true.

If you're really curious about what a woman is capable of, talk to a single mom, talk to a female high-level executive in any industry, talk to a woman in comedy — we can do anything.

Maybe the concern is not could she do it, but how would she do it? For instance, are people afraid that a woman in charge might be too soft? Too nurturing to run a big, bad city

like Chicago? Possibly, although I've seen a few "Saturday Morning Smackdowns" at crowded Targets, where more than a few women have reached the end of their ropes with three screaming kids in one hand and a crumpled Isaac Mizrahi tunic in the other.

Trust me, when a woman needs to restore order quickly, she can get it done. If your real concern is that a woman can't uphold our long-standing tradition of being mired in scandal, worry not. Ladies love scandal. They can turn the wrong pair of shoes into a federal offense.

Are people afraid that only men can hire their friends for coveted city jobs, instead of hiring legitimately qualified individuals? Please. Women invented this sort of favoritism. Ultimately, man or woman both are qualified to run this city. Or run it into the ground.



'PUT GYMS IN OFFICES'

Dawn Jackson Blatner, American Dietetic Association spokeswoman, says:

In general, women are way more weight-conscious than men. Women tend to have less time than men, and we are more nurturing.

So if women ruled Chicago, we'd make sure there was a gym at the office. But we couldn't just exercise; that would waste too much time. We'd multitask and sweat while working on the computer, making conference calls, and taking a meeting with the colleague on the next treadmill.

If women were in charge, I don't think Maggiano's would have to worry about going out of business. But we wouldn't have the same menu as men. There would be Smart Women Sized smaller portions, as opposed to what any old man would get shoved on his plate.

Snack carts and vending machines would be a little more health conscious. They would have actual produce, carrots and celery and almonds.

tions for Chicago's inner-city teachers.

- ◆ I would fund environmentally sound low-income housing.

- ◆ I would support grassroots organizations who are fighting to improve their neighborhoods.

- ◆ I would force all top level CTA managers to ride the CTA every single day until they get it right.

That's a start.

