

New members . . .

Boudreau brings inside experience to welfare debate

Rep. Lynda Boudreau may be a rookie at the Legislature, but she's no stranger to the welfare system, the center of one of this



Rep. Lynda Boudreau

session's most pressing issues.

Boudreau (IR-Faribault) has an up-close view of welfare in her job as a family health aide with the Rice County Public Health Nursing Services and the Women, Infants and

Children programs.

The decade-long experience helped shape her stance on welfare reform and her overall political ideology.

"My philosophy is [that] if you are provided the tools, you can learn to use them to get a job done," she said. "We are all capable of doing many things. We just need some direction and encouragement."

Her involvement in Independent-Republican politics started, oddly enough, after she attended a DFL caucus in the late 1980s. As a member of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters union and a county employee, Boudreau doesn't seem a natural for the conservative movement, but she found things more comfortable on the right.

"It seemed natural to adopt the philosophy of personal responsibility and fiscal conservatism," she said. "I don't believe in being wasteful, lazy, or apathetic."

Boudreau quickly became active with her local IRs. She was soon selected to sit on the board of the county IR committee, and while still "very green," found herself running caucuses in her district.

But the thrill of a political victory is what thrust Boudreau headlong into IR politics.

The thrill came when she helped in the campaign to get Sen. Thomas Neuville (IR-Northfield) elected in 1990.

"It was amazing to see that the process can be so rewarding," Boudreau said.

At the prodding of fellow party members, Boudreau decided to make her first run for public office in 1994 to fill an open seat. (DFLer Peter Rodosovich decided not to seek a seventh term.)

"It was not something I'd really considered doing, but I was somewhat intrigued and challenged to organize my own campaign," she said.

A lifelong resident of Faribault, she grew up in the same neighborhood as her husband, Jim, a professional tree trimmer. The couple, married for 24 years, has three children: an 18-year-old son and daughters, 20 and 23 years old.

Boudreau's involvement in her community made her a familiar face to many voters.

Stints as a volunteer Girl Scout leader and 4-H Club leader and Crisis Pregnancy Center counselor are included on her list. She also was a religious education teacher, a softball coach, a church cantor and choir member, a Faribault Senior High School parent adviser and a Booster Club parent.

Boudreau's personal endeavors further enhanced her visibility in the community. Among other things, she is a reserve officer for the Faribault police department and a bow hunting education instructor for the Department of Natural Resources. She continues to play on a women's softball team — her 25th year, and in the fall, she enjoys archery hunting.

Her political beliefs, including support of term limits for legislators, often fall in line with many basic conservative tenets.

Boudreau is an avid supporter of welfare reform, but she does so with the passionate and informed opinions of an insider. "I work in the system. I can tell you it needs to be reformed to provide incentives to work," she said.

"I often see a lack of motivation and feelings of hopelessness."

Part of her job for Rice County calls on Boudreau to teach single parents — some on welfare and some self-supporting — how to be good parents.

She supports measures in a reform bill (HF5) that would require welfare mothers who are minors to live with their parents and set work requirements for welfare recipients.

She offered an amendment to the bill that would remove fertility drugs from medical benefits for welfare recipients and successfully offered another amendment that would remove sex change surgery benefits from General Assistance Medical Care.

"We're giving people tools, and they should be utilizing them," Boudreau said. "If they choose not to, we're going to give them that little extra nudge."

— Nick Healy

District 25B

Population: 32,664

Distribution: 52.31 percent urban; 47.69 percent rural

Counties: Le Sueur, Rice, Waseca

Largest city: Faribault

Location: southeastern Minnesota

Unemployment rate: 4.64 percent

Residents living below poverty level: 9.13 percent

1992 presidential election results:

Bush/Quayle 31.16 percent

Clinton/Gore 39.72 percent

Perot/Stockdale 27.15 percent

Other: 1.97 percent