

Self-imposed term limits

A leader on crime and public safety, Rep. Sherry Broecker is leaving the House after three terms to return to her interest in local issues

BY CHRIS VETTER

Rep. Sherry Broecker (R-Little Canada) did not plan to get involved with politics, but a horrible accident drew her interest to local issues.

Broecker had witnessed a severe car accident near her former home in Vadnais Heights, where one car broadsided the vehicle in front of her own. Broecker helped remove children from the wrecked car.

That prompted her to think the intersection needed a stoplight.

"I knew I had to be proactive," she said.

She ran for the Vadnais Heights City Council. She won and served eight years beginning in 1986. Signals were soon added at the intersection.

Her work on the council led to a fight for a legislative seat. Broecker ran for the Legislature in 1994, defeating incumbent DFLer Rep. Marc Asch in a close and nasty fight. Legal battles came after the election.

Now, after six years in the Legislature, Broecker, a supporter of term limits who once promised to stay no more than six years in the House, has decided to step aside.

"It's been a huge honor to serve in the House," she said. "I've learned a lot. For my family and I, it's been a long 14 years (including service on the city council) of late-night meetings and rescheduled family events."

Broecker has enjoyed working at the Legislature, but she misses the hands-on experience of city council work.

"Down here, you lose a little bit of that close-connectiveness," she said. "It's a little more broad, and you are dealing with the whole state."

When other legislators talk about Broecker, they mention her friendship and her humor. Rep. Steve Smith (R-Mound) said Broecker knows how to break up a tense moment with a good joke.

"Always at the right moment, she knows how to make you laugh," Smith said. "I like her. I consider her a friend. She's an excellent chairwoman and a hard worker."

Broecker doesn't mind being thought of as a prankster. She laughs about the practical jokes she and other members have pulled on legislators. She mentioned a time when she purchased a frozen turkey and placed it on a legislator's desk during floor discussion on turkey stamps.

"If you can't have a little fun, there's no sense of being here," Broecker said.

Rep. Wes Skoglund (DFL-Mpls) also has served alongside Broecker on judiciary and crime-related committees.

"She is a very good person to be around," Skoglund said. "She was always inclusive in her decisions."

Early on, Broecker was assigned to the Judiciary Finance Committee — an area that she admits she knew relatively little about in the beginning. She wanted to broaden her areas of focus, and that new focus became crime issues.

When the Republicans won control of the House in the 1998 election, Broecker was awarded the chair of that committee. She said she has tried to

include all members of her committee in the decision-making process.

"You can sell what you are doing better when you have people with you that can help sell the idea," she said.

And she doesn't hesitate when she says her favorite legislation is "Katie's Law," which passed earlier this year. The law toughens penalties for repeat sex offenders and begins funding for a law enforcement information system.

"It was almost like it was back at the local level," Broecker said. "It was a sincere, heart-felt law."



Rep. Rich Stanek (R-Maple Grove), chair of the House Crime Prevention Committee, said he and Broecker have developed a valued friendship while working on crime-related issues.

"She has been dedicated to serving the criminal justice community and puts her heart into helping others," said Stanek. "On behalf of police officers, firefighters, crime victims, and public safety advocates, I thank her."

Broecker sponsored disaster relief for northern suburbs hit by a tornado and a domestic abuse reduction project in Ramsey County during her tenure. She also co-sponsored failed legislation in 1997 that would have allowed tax credits for people who donated to state colleges.

She has also supported permanent tax cuts in the past two years.

After six years in the Legislature, Broecker looks forward to new opportunities.


"I just felt it was time to prioritize my life," she said. "For me, that's my family."

Broecker's mother died a few months ago. She helped care for her mom during her last few years.

In addition to her desire to focus on her family, including three sons age 19 to 25, Broecker is a believer in term limits.

"I said six years ago in my campaign brochures that I would only serve three terms, and I stand by that," she said.

Broecker is not sure what will come next. She said a lobbying position is not high on her list. She looks forward to building a new home on Forest Lake with her husband, Jerry.

"I don't know what's in store," she said. "I'll put it in the good Lord's hands and whatever will be, will be." 

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Sherry Broecker
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Terms: 3

Career notes: Currently the chair of the House Judiciary Finance Committee, Broecker was the sponsor of "Katie's Law," a 2000 measure crafted in the wake of the abduction of Katie Poirier from a Moose Lake convenience store. The law prescribes a variety of changes to protect the public from sex offenders.