

Standing her ground

Goodwin says that the time has come to move on

Editor's Note: As the 2006 session winds down, several members have announced their intentions to leave the Minnesota House of Representatives for new adventures. They leave a legacy of service that will remain part of legislative history.

By **BAO ONG**

More than 20 years ago, Rep. Barb Goodwin (DFL-Columbia Heights) sent a handwritten letter to a representative about her opposition to school vouchers. She never received a response. The mother of two children, Goodwin's fury to the lack of response motivated her to step into the legislative arena.

"People deserve to have a response from their representatives," said Goodwin, who worked on Sen. Ann Rest's (DFL-New Hope) first successful campaign for a House seat in 1984. "Dance with the ones who brought you here."

In her third and last term, Goodwin said she has always used her constituents' concerns to guide her every decision since 2000, when she was first elected to office. Some of her most important issues included health care, and consumer and labor rights.

Goodwin worked for the House DFL Caucus as a research analyst on business and labor issues from 1985 to 1987 and then as director of central staff until 1994. Then from 1994 to 1998, she was legislative affairs director for the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees.

Now, after six years in office, Goodwin said it is time for her to move on. The life of a legislator is consuming, both physically and mentally, she said. "There are so many things I want to do outside of the Legislature," said Goodwin, whose future plans include traveling, possibly writing a book and teaching college courses.

Being in the minority party doesn't help. Goodwin said she is afraid that her cynicism toward the legislative

process could hinder her effectiveness as a representative. She is concerned about where the state is headed and frustrated when legislation she supports does not receive hearings. "We managed to get some work done," Goodwin said. "That already took a lot of work, and there's more that needs to be done."

However, that cynicism is what set Goodwin apart from others, even in her own party. She is known to be fearless in her questioning and has butted heads with other members on more than one occasion.

During this session, she verbally sparred with members on issues ranging from holding homebuilders liable for faulty construction work to the right of pharmacists to deny patients a prescription drug based on their moral, ethical or religious values.



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Barb Goodwin, seen here speaking during a House floor debate, is retiring after three terms.

"It's not easy, but it's from being in this process for many years," said Goodwin, who added that she has never had intentions to run for higher office. "I believe, in the very deepest part of me, that challenges have to be made during the legislative process."

The role of special interest groups also contributed to Goodwin's decision to step down. She said the amount of money flowing in from these groups and lobbyists determines which bills receive hearings, creates less access for members of the public to testify and less pro-consumer legislation.

Goodwin also said that lobbyists are writing some of the legislation for members, and caucuses have to raise millions of dollars to be effective. Debate on the issues is not where I think it should be, Goodwin said.

One highlight in Goodwin's career is her anti-bullying bill. She became aware of the problem when she worked for Hennepin County in the children's mental health services programs. The bill requires schools to develop a policy against bullying.

Goodwin said her job in the House has allowed her to impact the lives of her constituents, who have contacted her on everything from finding affordable health insurance to securing social security checks to fraud.

Rep. Kent Eken (DFL-Twin Valley) said, "She's one who speaks from the heart, and is a great advocate for those who need a voice. She really cares about people — regular folks, working folks."

Although Goodwin does not have plans to run for office again, she said other first- and second-term members have shown they can make a difference.

"I still believe there's hope," Goodwin said. "If they just remember the people and stand up for them, we'll be in good hands." 🌸

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Barb Goodwin
DFL

District 50A – Columbia Heights

Terms: 3 (elected 2000)

Advice to successor: "You don't work for the lobbyists or party, but the people who put you here. Remember why you're here."