

No regrets

After a dozen years in the House, Leppik is stepping aside, having reached her self-imposed term limit

BY THERESA STAHL

Rep. Peggy Leppik (R-Golden Valley) says she hopes she will be remembered for being a “good, effective” legislator. She will likely also be remembered for her final words on the House floor said after working through a long night to finish the session.

Leppik, with an inadvertent but endearing *faux pas*, declared her seatmate Rep. Jim Rhodes (R-St. Louis Park) “a wonderful roommate,” which was followed by laughter from the weary members, herself included.

“That is probably the most memorable thing I’ve said in 12 years,” she recalled in an interview, laughing again. “Without a doubt.”

Leppik is retiring after six terms, a decision that wasn’t affected by redistricting.

“I’ve always had it in the back of my mind that eight to 12 years is a reasonable length of time to serve,” she said, “that you should be able to make some kind of positive contribution to achieve something in that time. And I still believe that.

“I also think that it’s very healthy to have change, both (personally) and politically — for the district.”

She said some people believe there is little hope for challenging an incumbent so they do not get involved. “But when there is no incumbent they start thinking about it in a different way.”

Before running for office, Leppik was involved in her community, participating in her kids’ schools, a planning commission, board of zoning appeals, her college alumni association, and served as president of the Minnesota Opera Association.

But it was the League of Women Voters that “really moved me down this track toward running for office,” she said.

Leppik’s predecessor was retiring, and he called to ask if she would run for office.

“I had to think about it for a while. I had never even really thought about it before.”

Now she says she wouldn’t trade it for the world. “It has introduced me to a world of new ideas, new experiences, new people,” she said.

Many of those experiences have come from serving on an array of committees, including



PHOTO BY ANDREW VON BANK

Rep. Peggy Leppik is stepping down after 12 years in the House.

health, K-12 education, environment, commerce, bonding, and higher education finance, which Leppik currently chairs.

“That’s part of what makes the job of a legislator so interesting — you learn so much about so many things that you were never involved with before and you meet absolutely wonderful people along the way.”

It is the people that Leppik will miss the most. “I’ll also miss going places and seeing things that I would otherwise never have the opportunity to see,” she said.

Some of those unique opportunities have happened just while campaigning. An idea for a bill Leppik sponsored came while door knocking.

It was “a direct result of someone in his yard saying ‘Hey, why don’t you guys change the park permit so that they follow a 12-month cycle instead of a calendar year?’” Leppik recalled. The bill passed rather quickly and ended up saving the Department of Natural

Resources some money.

“The (bills) that are extremely gratifying are the ones you start out on your own, the ones that constituents bring to you,” she said.

This year Leppik sponsored a law restricting phosphorus fertilizer. For years she was concerned about what is being put on residential lawns and how it was affecting wildlife and ecology in wetland areas.

Leppik said she’s ready to retire, but it’s hard to go knowing there’s more she could do.

“It’s leaving the people you’ve worked with that’s very hard because you work with them in a very special kind of environment — it’s a pressure cooker.”

Rhodes, her seatmate on the House floor, said he and Leppik have a lot in common and he will miss working with her.

“She is a legislator that could work with everybody on both sides of the aisle,” he said. “She has great knowledge and passion for her issues. She is someone that has a voice of moderation.”

Rep. Joe Opatz (DFL-St. Cloud) said Leppik is a strong advocate for higher education.

“She cared deeply about higher ed, particularly the U of M,” said Opatz, who serves on the higher education finance committee.

“She’s thoughtful and listened to all sides of sometimes difficult issues, and was fair in allowing members to express interests and concerns,” he said.

Leppik has no immediate plans, except for a trip this winter to New Zealand.

And though it may be hard to leave, she has no regrets.

“I would much rather leave when I’m feeling very good about what I’ve done than leave thinking that I’ve stayed too long.”

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Peggy Leppik

Republican

District 45B — Golden Valley

Terms: 6

Career Notes: Leppik is chair of the House Higher Education Finance Committee, and served on health and human services, K-12 education finance, environment and natural resources, capital investment, and commerce, jobs, and economic development committees.