

1991 House Leadership Series . . .

Despite skirmishes, Long loves the process

In the 1960s, Rep. Dee Long questioned authority. The one-time activist fought for civil rights and opposed the war in Vietnam. She looked at the Democrats and the Republicans, and found both parties lacking.

Today, she is a cornerstone of the "authority" she once questioned.

As House Majority leader, the Minneapolis DFLer is one of the most powerful people in state government. She is the tactician who keeps the caucus in line, and the person who often articulates the party's views on the House floor.

She's known as a tough fighter, and holds down one of the most partisan jobs in the most partisan of atmospheres. But colleagues in both the DFL and IR caucuses credit Long with keeping rancor to a minimum, and praise her energy, wit, and openness.

"I think you just have to be fair and try not to mislead people," Long says. "There are going to be honest differences of opinion. If there weren't, we'd only have one party in this state."

And that, of course, would take all of the fun out of politics.

"It is fun," she says. "I don't think in the entire time I've been in the Legislature I've seen the leadership allowing political differences to become personal differences."

Her ability to work with members of both parties may very well stem from her childhood, having come from a *mixed* political family. Her father frequently championed liberal causes while her mother often worked with grassroots Republican organizations.

There's no question there will be plenty of opportunities for Long to test her party negotiating skills this year. The DFL majorities in the House and the Senate must reach a budget agreement for the 1992-93 biennium with Independent-Republican Gov. Arne Carlson.

"So far, things have gone quite smoothly between us and the governor," she says. "I think it's a little difficult to predict whether this is going to continue, but I think we've gone a few extra miles for him and I hope he will reciprocate."

Despite her optimism, Long says she's



Majority Leader Dee Long

also bracing for some rocky periods: "If we get through this session with absolutely smooth relationships among all branches of government, I think it will surprise everyone."

Although much of her time is now spent running the House DFL Caucus, Long quickly established herself as one of the Legislature's strongest advocates for the environment following her election in 1978.

She worked for more than three years to gain passage of the state's "superfund" law, which is designed to clean up hazardous waste sites and dumps.

She is also well-known for her efforts to rejuvenate the public's trust in elected officials.

Long has chaired a House select committee on ethics and has been known to advise incoming members "to act as if whatever you're going to do will be on the front page of the paper tomorrow and you won't have a chance to respond."

Before being elected majority leader in June 1989, she served a stint as speaker pro tem of the House and later chaired the Taxes Committee, also one of the most important positions in state government.

"I haven't led a terribly planned life," the former psychology professor says of

her ascent through the party ranks. "My philosophy on that is if you set out at the age of 21 to achieve a certain goal, the likelihood of making it isn't that great and you're going to be disappointed."

And perhaps that's why she's hesitant to talk about future moves.

"I'm quite happy doing what I'm doing right now," she says. "It's challenging, it's stimulating. It can be a little frustrating, but sometimes it can just be a lot of fun."

— Dave Price