

Rep. Dee Long . . .

## Ten-term legislator seeks secretary of state position

By Grant Martin



Rep. Dee Long (DFL-Mpls) said in a recent interview that she learned valuable political lessons from the good sisters of the St. Stephen's Convent in South Minneapolis.

"The nuns were activists," she said.

Long said that she had been volunteering in the civil rights and antiwar movements years ago and felt she should attend her precinct caucus, which happened to be at St. Stephen's Church.

"The nuns took my hand and said, 'Would you like to be a delegate?' I said, 'Yeah, how do I get in?' And they said, 'Well, we'll help you.' So, I guess, I really learned my grass roots political involvement from the St. Stephen's Convent nuns," Long said.

In fact, the nuns completed a long political education that began with her politically active parents, Long said.

"I was raised with the thought that you owe something to your community and to society as a whole," she said. "You have an obligation to try to leave things better when you leave this place."

Long's father was very involved in politics and would take her to both parties' headquarters on election night to watch the returns. Long recalls being introduced to people from both sides of the aisle who were very passionate about their political involvement.

"I was left with the impression that politics was something that was an appropriate involvement and fun," she said.

Elected to the House in 1978, Long announced this year that she will be leaving the Legislature to run for secretary of state.

"I have spent 20 years in this position," she said. "I think sometimes you just feel it's time to move on and, intuitively, now is the time."

Long said she is excited about the possibility of tackling the secretary of state job. She sees the job as key to securing public participation in the political process.

"I have been concerned for a number of years about the sense of disengagement from public life and community in general," she said. "We need to get back to more of a feeling that we are a part of a neighborhood or a community — part of a city or a town. That was one of the things that inspired me to run for [the secretary of state] office."



Veteran legislator Rep. Dee Long has seen many changes since she was elected to the House in 1978. She's hoping to take what she has learned into her campaign for secretary of state.

In many ways, Long's legislative career illustrates the advances made by women in politics. Long was the first woman to chair the House Taxes Committee and the second woman elected as DFL majority leader. In 1993, she became the first woman elected speaker of the House.

Long said that women tend to bring a different and valuable perspective to lawmaking.

"I do think women bring somewhat different experiences," she said. "And I do think women's style of leadership can be somewhat different. I think women don't, as much, need the feeling that they have personal power. They tend to be much more conciliatory."

Long said women have brought important issues to the table, including child care and child support. She said that these concerns are now much more prevalent in society.

"I have noticed a difference in the younger male members — the greater appreciation of the role of working wives and mothers," she said.

Long resigned the speaker position in the fall of 1993 amid criticism of her response to the "phongate" controversy.

"I certainly could have handled the situation better," she said. "I learned a lot from mistakes that were made."

Since 1993, Long has mounted what political insiders have been calling a major comeback. She was named chair of the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs Committee in 1995. In 1997, she regained the chair of the powerful Taxes Committee, and she has been spending a good deal of her time working on tax issues.

However, for Long, other legislative accomplishments stand out.

"What I feel best about is the environmental legislation," she said. "That will make a difference 50 or 100 years from now. Changes in tax law are interesting to work on, but I don't think that they have that same durability."

Long said that she will miss the times when legislators can rise above differences in party and local interests.

"What I will remember with great fondness are the times when you have members from both parties working together to accomplish some real policy goals," she said. "That, to me, is the Legislature at its best." 