

What's good for small business is good for McCollum

Last year, Rep. Betty McCollum (DFL-North St. Paul) accomplished a rare feat. She defeated not just one, but two incumbents in order to win a seat in the House of Representatives.



Rep. Betty McCollum

In the DFL primary, she beat six-term state Rep. Rich O'Connor of St. Paul, and in the general election, she defeated one-term IR state Rep. Dennis Newinski of Maplewood.

McCollum said her victories demonstrated that voters are capable of limiting a lawmaker's term at the voting booth when they feel a need for change.

The unusual challenge came McCollum's way because of redistricting. The new district 55B includes all of North St. Paul, part of Maplewood, and the northeast corner of St. Paul. If anyone makes the mistake of saying her district is primarily suburban, McCollum is quick to point out that North St. Paul, where she and her family live, is not a suburb, but a one-hundred-year-old freestanding city.

McCollum, who is 38, is a professional sales management trainer, a licensed social studies

teacher, and the married mother of two. She has a bachelor's degree in political science from the College of St. Catherine, and she served six years on the North St. Paul City Council before running for the Legislature.

The district she represents is primarily blue-collar, and its economic strength is small business, with much of that business family-owned, she said.

For blue-collar workers, labor issues such as plant closing notification and vocational retraining are of special concern. Her district's small business owners "want opportunities to invest and expand fairly." When considering new legislation, "what's good for small business is what I have to keep in mind," she said.

When she was out doorknocking in the three communities she now serves, McCollum didn't perceive any tension between suburban vs. city needs. To the contrary, residents of Maplewood and North St. Paul are concerned about the health and vitality of St. Paul and don't want to see an increase in crime or loss of jobs in the inner city, she said.

McCollum has been personally touched by the economic uncertainties that worry many of her constituents. She has worked for the past 12

years at Sears, which recently announced plans to lay off 50,000 workers nationwide. Even a state legislator is not immune to an economic layoff, and McCollum wonders if she'll have a job to go back to at the end of the session.

That worry and frequent contact with her constituents have given her a close-up view of the issues that she must now address as a lawmaker. It is one thing to pore over statistics at your desk, she said, but "you get a different perspective sitting with employees in the breakroom."

—Ruth Hammond

District 55B

Population: 32,651
Distribution: 99.2 percent urban, 0.8 percent rural
County: Ramsey
Largest city: St. Paul (portion)
Location: northern Metro
1992 presidential election results:
Bush/Quayle: 26.4 percent
Clinton/Gore: 50.6 percent
Perot/Stockdale: 22.4 percent
Other: 0.6 percent