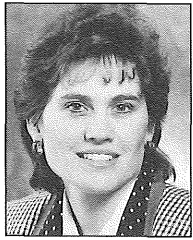


Neary pushing for tax and campaign reform

Newly elected legislators have long come to the Capitol with proposals to change the course of the state. Rep. Pam Neary (DFL-Afton) is no exception.



Rep. Pam Neary

But Neary, whose district stretches from Lake Elmo to the Wisconsin border's Prescott Bridge, wasted no time in tackling two major systems — property taxes and state aid to local governments.

A measure she's proposed would virtually turn old tax and revenue systems upside down. Property taxes would be linked to income and ability to pay; state aid would flow to communities according to their revenue-raising capacities.

Neary's proposal (HF921) would "narrow" state funding priorities to schools, family programs, and children's services. Fire and police protection, and expenses such as road maintenance and plowing would be left to local communities.

Removing traditional school reliance on property taxes, Neary believes, would be a change well-received by her constituents. District 56B,

in the east metro area, includes Lake Elmo, Lakeland, Afton, Denmark Township, and the eastern half of Woodbury.

Neary said she hoped to remain focused on issues that are important to her constituents through a series of town meetings she holds with other local elected officials. She initiated the meetings shortly after taking office.

She described her constituents as "well-read, and very cognizant of what the issues are. They also know what needs to be shored up and strengthened."

Neary attributes her area's interest in public policy partly to the rapid residential development in Washington County. Families new to the area, she said, "want to connect themselves to their community. It's the new suburban mechanism of connectedness."

Creativity should be more frequently offered in suburban schools, according to Neary. "Families are looking for more choices in education — to crack some molds if their child doesn't fit in. They are pressuring schools to take some risks and offer more choices."

Neary has been a government affairs consultant for the National Organization of Women, the Community Clinic Consortium, and Friends

of Public Education. Formerly, she was a program evaluator in the Office of the Legislative Auditor. Before moving here from Colorado, she was a substitute teacher.

Two months into her new job, Neary has sponsored nearly a dozen bills proposing change — bills which range from campaign reform to encouraging state employees to do things differently by offering monetary incentives for money-saving ideas.

"We need people who are willing to push for change," said Neary. "Expanding people's horizons and bringing up new ideas is a crucial part of my job."

—Joyce Peterson

District 56B

Population: 32,555

Distribution: 74.5 percent urban, 25.5 percent rural

County: Washington

Largest City: Woodbury

Location: eastern Metro

1992 presidential election results:

Clinton/Gore: 40.1 percent

Bush/Quayle: 33.0 percent

Perot/Stockdale: 26.3 percent

Other: 0.6 percent