

Goodbye 'My Fair Lady'

Sykora's 12 years of service marked with fairness, inclusion

Editor's Note: As the 2006 session winds down, several members have announced their intentions to leave the Minnesota House of Representatives for new adventures. They leave a legacy of service that will remain part of legislative history.

By **BAO ONG**

Rep. Barb Sykora (R-Excelsior) said deciding not to run for re-election was more difficult than when she chose to first run 12 years ago.

"I've tried to work my hardest serving the people," said Sykora, who announced her retirement last month. "It's kind of like feeling that you're letting people down."

Education Commissioner Alice Seagren might attribute that onerous decision to

One time Seagren did not support a bill Sykora sponsored allowing grocery stores to sell wine. "Barb simply said, 'Alice, I don't understand why you don't support this bill,'" recalls Seagren. "But she didn't let that get in the way of a friendship or lively discussion."

"I'm sorry to see her going. She's been a very moderate, strong voice for her community, district and the state of Minnesota," said Seagren. "She will be missed."

Sykora attributes much of her work ethic and morals to her father, John Zwach, who served in both the House and Senate. She said he instilled in her that a "strong democracy needs high standards, ethics and tolerance of other views. You cannot do what's just good for you." Sykora also said, "I'm a give-it-my-all

type of person."

In raising her four children, Sykora has tried to do the same. Her family is the main reason she decided to retire from the House after being involved for more than half her life. With her husband now retired and three children living outside Minnesota, Sykora wants to devote more time to them.

While she also wants to spend more time on her golf game, traveling and gardening, Sykora plans to stay involved with her local Rotary Club, bank board and a few chamber groups.

But deciding to step down was still a difficult decision. Sykora said that since the

Republicans became the majority, the biggest change she has seen is that it became easier to accomplish certain goals.

One accomplishment happened last year when the Legislature passed a bill establishing performance pay for teachers. A former school teacher, Sykora hopes it will increase student performance while also rewarding and providing training opportunities for teachers.

Sykora said establishing laws to entice more businesses to operate in Minnesota, worker's compensation reform and health care access have also been important issues throughout her tenure in the House.

She does not view issues as partisan but more in the vein of fairness and big-picture issues, such as "small town versus large cities," she said.

The first bill Sykora introduced that became law was a perfect example.

As a freshman legislator, Sykora saw a flaw in the foster care system. Her bill required interviews of the child and foster care family to be recorded if an issue such as child abuse came up. It was a way to keep potentially biased counselors out of such a situation, she said.

Even with the strong presence of lobbyists, Sykora said they only have so much influence on her decision making. "There are good lobbyists out there and they can provide you good information. But I always try to look at what's good 20 years from now and not just what one person or party says."

Sykora also serves on the House Education Policy and Reform, and Ways and Means committees.


"I have no regrets from the last 12 years," said Sykora. "Often when you close one door, other unexpected ones can open." 



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

Rep. Barb Sykora attributes her work ethic to her father, John Zwach, who served in the Minnesota House and Senate. He also served as a congressman representing the former Sixth District.

Sykora's commitment to fairness. As chair of the House Education Finance Committee, Sykora has always tried to be fair in holding hearings and promoting healthy debate, said Seagren, a former representative from Bloomington.

STEPPING DOWN

**Rep. Barb Sykora
Republican**

**District 33B — Excelsior
Terms: Six (elected 1994)**

Advice to successor: "Have an open door. Be willing to listen to all sides."