

Iowan Wejcman finds greener pastures in city

From Lake Street's urban brew to Minnehaha Parkway's well-groomed lawns, Minneapolis' District 60B is best described as diverse.

Beginning near the old Minneapolis Sears, 60B cuts a deep swath south along Nicollet Avenue to include some of the wealthier and poorer areas of Minneapolis.

But, for the freshman lawmaker who represents 60B in the House, the district's crazy-quilt variety of lifestyles, incomes, and races is not a headache.

"It's really super. I think all that the diversity does is add strength," says Rep. Linda Wejcman (DFL-Mpls).

After all, it wasn't more homogeneity that Wejcman was after when she fled her native Iowa for bigger and more exciting places. Once here, she has not only enjoyed the benefits, but has set about tackling the problems of city life.

A full-time community activist, Wejcman formally stepped into the political arena when former DFL Rep. Peter McLaughlin decided to run for a seat on the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners.

Although the political action is bigger at the Capitol, Wejcman says the routine isn't much different from her 15 years in neighborhood politics — further proof that all politics is, in fact, local.

"It's that meetings-all-the-time type of thing. Phone calls to handle, people with



Linda Wejcman (pronounced WAITS-man)

District 60B

Age: 51

Home: Minneapolis

Occupation: Consultant/community activist

District traits: 60B includes a section of Minneapolis' south side. The heavily DFL district voted for Paul Wellstone over Rudy Boschwitz in the 1990 U.S. Senate race by a 78.7-to-21.2 percent margin.

problems. It's pretty much what I expected," she says.

For 15 years, Wejcman and her husband, Jim, have been residents of the south side neighborhood. She helped found the Central Neighborhood Improvement Association in 1978, and is currently in her third term as president of the Southside Neighborhood Improvement Association.

Her 60B constituents, says Wejcman, are unified by a "general caring" about the problems associated with city living. While campaigning, she found a willingness to pay taxes for services that specifically combat urban blight: job programs, education, and work readiness.

As a member of the Health and Human Services Committee, Wejcman hopes to help shape the social programs her constituents prefer.

And with a seat on the Judiciary Committee, Wejcman says she also hopes to have a say in crafting the state's drug laws, noting that drug-related crimes have increased in her district in recent years. It's a concern that truly unifies the neighborhood, regardless of income, she adds.

"Crime is greater in some parts of the district," Wejcman admits. "But, even in the higher income area when I door-knocked last summer, I found one block that had shut down three crack houses within two weeks."

With the Energy, Governmental Operations, and Housing committees filling out her calendar, Wejcman notes a fortuitous match between her legislative assignments and 60B's concerns.

"I really feel lucky — and busy," she says.

It's a fact!

Female Supremes used to come in threes.

In Minnesota, there are now four of them, but — as far as anyone knows — Diana Ross has never performed with Justices Rosalie Wahl, M. Jeanne Coyne, Esther Tomljanovich, and Sandra Gardebring of the Minnesota Supreme Court.

What is special about the quartet of Minnesota Supreme Court justices is that they comprise the only female majority on any court of last resort in the nation.

Michigan (two of its five high court justices are women) ranks second in the gender balance scale, followed by Oklahoma, where two of its nine high court justices are women.

Twenty-one states have no women sitting on their courts of last resort.



Minnesota Supreme Court Justices (back row L-R) Esther M. Tomljanovich, John E. Simonett, M. Jeanne Coyne, Sandra S. Gardebring, (front row L-R) Lawrence R. Yetka, A.M. Keith and Rosalie E. Wahl.
(Photo courtesy Minnesota Supreme Court)