

**TRIBUTE TO ANN WYNIA -- HON. BRUCE F. VENTO (Extension of
Remarks - October 23, 1989)**

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HON. BRUCE F. VENTO**in the House of Representatives***WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 1989*

- Mr. VENTO. Mr. Speaker, I recently had the honor to attend an American Medical Association award ceremony in honor of a special friend and effective legislator from St. Paul, MN. Commissioner Ann Wynia of Minnesota's Department of Human Service was one of eight officials nationwide to receive the American Medical Association Award for Outstanding Public Service. I also want to congratulate our colleague Congressman **Henry Waxman**, chairman of the Health and Environment Subcommittee who was also selected to receive the prestigious award.
- Prior to being appointed as commissioner, Ann served as the majority leader of the Minnesota House of Representatives. In that capacity, Ann was a strong guiding force behind efforts to improve the quality of life for all Minnesotans--particularly the young, the poor, and the disabled. Her resignation is a loss to the State legislature, but as we face serious changes in the health care system, it is comforting for the people of Minnesota to know that they have such a strong advocate at the helm of the department of human services.
- I would like to bring to my colleagues' attention an article about Ann Wynia which was written by Louis Porter of the St. Paul Pioneer Press Dispatch.

Ann Wynia, the state's new human services commissioner, rejects single issue labels for herself, but there's no mistaking her commitment to children.

Her proudest moment, the former DFL lawmaker from St Paul recalled in a recent interview, was the passage of the 1987 Children's Health Plan. Wynia was chief House sponsor of the bill, which expanded eligibility for medical care to children of the so-called working poor, people whose incomes were too high to qualify for medical assistance, but who couldn't afford health insurance either.

'Truly, this is my favorite bill,' said the former House majority leader, who

earlier this month took the helm at the state's largest bureaucracy, the Human Services Department. 'I realize there are many different needs that this department has to respond to. This doesn't mean I won't pay attention to other programs.'

But she said society's highest responsibility is to children and dependent persons.

'We think of children as resilient,' she said. 'Well, they don't always recover.'

In addition to child welfare, Wynia's agency administers public assistance programs, as well as services for refugees and handicapped people. Eight regional mental health treatment centers and two nursing homes also fall under the department's jurisdiction. Its \$2 billion budget includes a payroll of more than 7,000 employees.

'I wouldn't have left the Legislature to run the state lottery, but this job gives me the opportunity to work on some things that are really important,' Wynia said.

Voters in House District 63B, the city's northwest corner, first elected Wynia in 1976. She served for 13 years, until her resignation Sept. 8 to accept Gov. Rudy Perpich's appointment to the human services post.

State Rep. Lee Greenfield, DFL-Minneapolis, said Wynia will bring special skills to her new position.

'She has a great deal of knowledge of the Human Services Department and what its goals are and the people it serves,' Greenfield said.

Her lack of experience administering a large agency won't be a problem, he predicted.

'Dealing with legislators has got to be at least as hard--if not harder--than working with assistant commissioners and deputy commissioners,' Greenfield said.

Wynia said her biggest disappointment in the Legislature was being kicked off all the health and human services committees when Independent-Republicans came to power in 1985.

But she said she kept working anyway on the issues she cared about most, although more indirectly than before.

Wynia said a cadre of strong women preceded her in the Legislature, particularly in 1972, when DFLers Phyllis Kahn, Linda Berglin and Joan Grove, and Independent-Republicans Mary Forsythe and Nancy Brataas were elected.

Because they paved the way, Wynia said, the Legislature in 1976 was probably less sexist than it would have been otherwise.

'Not only were they able legislators, they weren't going to put up with sexism,' Wynia said.

But Wynia is accustomed to being around men and working with them. The second eldest of four children, Wynia was the family's only daughter. Her father, who died this summer, ran a car dealership in her Coleman, Texas, hometown. Her mother worked for him as a bookkeeper.

Drought through the 1950s devastated the farm economy, with ripple effects on businesses such as her father's.

'You don't sell cars when farmers are having a tough time,' she said, adding that her experiences then helped her empathize with Minnesota farmers who came to the Legislature for help frequently during her time in office.

At the University of Texas at Arlington, Wynia had a government professor who sparked her fascination with Minnesota. Luther Haggard always bragged to his students about his home state of Minnesota, she recalled.

'He always talked enthusiastically about the state, its political system and people,' Wynia said. 'It intrigued me.'

Later, in graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, she met her future husband, Gary. They spent a year in Central America while he did research on his master's thesis. After that, he was offered a teaching position at the University of Minnesota.

'It was like a dream come true when he was offered a job here,' Wynia said.

In 1970, she went to work at North Hennepin Community College and continued there until 1986, when she found that being majority leader left her no time for teaching.

Gary Wynia, a specialist in Latin American politics, now teaches at Carleton College in Northfield.

Wynia said it's interesting in her new job to meet with legislators from the other

side of the table. Now she's lobbying, trying to gain her former colleagues' support.

Of her many goals, Wynia especially wants to help people work toward independence.

'I want increased opportunities for children, families and people with disabilities to feel more in control of their lives, more able to achieve their dreams,' she said.

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