

Part of the plan

From the time she was a little girl, Brod has been preparing for her a life of public service and her new role as legislator

By PATTY JANOVEC

While the siblings of Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague) were watching cartoons, she turned her attention, during her formative years, to the news of the day. She said that her father claims she has been interested in government since the tender age of 5.



Rep. Laura Brod

Her attention to the functions of local government led her into urban and regional studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato. She said that education helped her land a position on the New Prague City Council, an experience, she said that helped in her understanding of how local government works.

Said Jerry Bohnsack, city administrator for New Prague, "She was only with us for four years, but we miss her."

When Brod was first elected to the council, Bohnsack said she reminded him of a "little girl," listening and gaining knowledge on issues. Later, he said, she tackled a street reconstruction project and, "she asked questions you wouldn't think of." Her perspective, he said, lent valuable insight into a complex situation.

Bohnsack said Brod would later stand up to a Citizen's League report that surveyed taxes in several communities, including New Prague. The report labeled the city with the highest taxes in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. He said Brod "got to know the tax system, asked a lot of questions" and the city was eventually excluded from the survey after she found that potentially unfair comparisons were made. He says she is "super intelligent, but yet has a lot of common sense."

As a legislator Brod now represents a district comprised of small towns, where the largest population of any municipality is nearly 5,000. "It's a fabulous collection of small towns that are individual," she said. "They each have

their own different characteristics."

Brod said that her campaign agenda included focusing on economic development, which can draw young people back to the rural areas, like New Prague with its welcoming and warm atmosphere. That's exactly what she and her husband, Wade, decided to do when they had two children — now ages 7 and 5. Following redistricting and discussion with her family, she decided to run for state office. Brod admits that balancing family life is a challenge, but she said, "luckily I have extended family that live in my town, and my husband has a flexible job."

Along with her job as a legislator, Brod is an appraiser of agricultural and residential property. Because of the experience, she said that

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she understands market values, growth, and tax issues. And with two children in public schools, she said she can relate to the educational needs of the area, as well.

Schools, education, and economic development are all important to her district, Brod said. But transportation is also coming more to the forefront since more residents drive into the Twin Cities metropolitan area to work. Minnesota needs to get people moving, she said, and "if there is a way we can increase the ability for people to get to their jobs without losing money by sitting on a highway, I'm all for it."

Also becoming important, Brod said, is local government aid. She said her area, like many rural communities, depends heavily on those funds. Although Gov. Tim Pawlenty has proposed caps on the cuts, "most

communities would be at the greater end of the cap" in her district, Brod said.

Much like she did as a new city councilor, Brod has spent much of her time as a new legislator "really getting my arms around the mechanics of this place."

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The first bill Brod sponsored (HF450) would give people who drive vehicles operating on fuel with an 85 percent ethanol blend the ability to use the high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. Brod said a citizen brought forth the idea at a town meeting.

She said that at a time of possible war alternative fuels are important and that the state needs to increase the ethanol market by understanding the need to reduce reliance on foreign oil.

HF450 awaits a hearing by the House Transportation Policy Committee. Its Senate

companion (SF466), sponsored by Sen. Thomas Neville (R-Northfield), also awaits a committee hearing.

DISTRICT 25A

2002 population: 36,729

Largest city: New Prague

Counties: Le Sueur, Scott, Sibley

Location: south-central Minnesota

Top concern: "When I talk to people, the budget is definitely one, two, three and four. We're talking about the specific cuts, the ways government can work better, ways that government is being wasteful, quality of employees that work in government."

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