

Lifetime advocate

After years of working in the community to organize others to make change, Hornstein wants to do the same in the House

BY PATTY JANOVEC

Watching the news and keeping abreast of current events was a family affair while Rep. Frank Hornstein (DFL-Mpls) was growing up.



Rep. Frank Hornstein

Although his family wasn't politically active, some very specific values came through during his formative years: faith, justice, and respect for others.

Hornstein's parents survived the Holocaust, and immigrated to the United States after World War II. As a result, he was always aware of the need to fight for those who struggle with injustice. His family has "seen the worst, and America has provided us with the best."

He traces his political activism back to the first Earth Day in 1970. Hornstein was in fifth grade, and he said was so moved by the thought of protecting the environment that he walked home from school instead of taking the carpool. Later he picked up litter around the neighborhood.

Growing up at a time of war in Vietnam and during the fight for civil rights, the idea of making change through collective action impressed him greatly, he said. In college he learned he could make a career of organizing people to do just that. Soon he was helping residents in St. Paul's Frogtown neighborhood deal with crime issues and affordable housing. Later, while helping to organize Minnesota's chapter of Clean Water Action, he said he became more familiar with electoral issues because of his exposure to the environment at the State Capitol.

While promoting recycling and reducing landfills, he said he got excited about how faith and environmental groups were interested in a metropolitan agenda. At the time the Metropolitan Council was addressing issues of affordable housing, urban sprawl, and transportation, but there was nobody holding it accountable, he said. Hornstein then formed

the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, which still exists.

Gov. Jesse Ventura appointed Hornstein to the Met Council in December 2000, which was his first experience in direct public service. The new role enabled him to work on the key issues that were important to him from the beginning: affordable housing and the environment. He served the council until January 2003.

He's now making a different kind of impact as a legislator, and he says there is a certain power vested in public officials to bring forth the ideas of their constituents. He's "really proud to represent constituents in so many

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— Rep. Frank Hornstein

ways, it really reflects the things I've worked on all along."

Although Hornstein didn't have an opponent while running for the House, Melissa Manderschied, events coordinator for the campaign, said that didn't stop him from pounding the pavement.

"He felt it was important to meet those in his district even though he didn't have to," she said, adding that he is sincerely genuine when meeting people. She said she feels that's one of the reasons he makes a great legislator. She explained how he shows "follow up and care over an extended period of time" with those he meets.

Hornstein's district contains both lakes Calhoun and Harriet, an area he said has a diverse constituent base with many renters and homeowners. An issue important to his district includes one that city and suburbs can come together on: transportation. Even though the political parties have different philosophies, he says common ground can be found.

The top issue on his list is education. As part

of that, he said he strongly believes that the budget "should not be balanced on the backs of hard working public employees," including the state's teachers. He said teachers need to be compensated with competitive wages and benefits and he's heard from constituents that have expressed great disappointment with the governor's proposed wage freeze on teachers.

A key bill he will be working on this year would give tax credits to individuals who purchase hybrid cars. He says a whole range of national security and environmental issues can be addressed by promoting the use of technology already in existence.

Hornstein said he hopes to meld his faith-based values, rooted in Judaism, with his commitment to public service. His wife, Marcia Zimmerman, is senior rabbi at Temple Israel in Minneapolis. The Legislature is a place for people to bring their religious values to work, but not impose them on others, he said.

"No one can separate the personal and political, you are who you are, your faith

tradition," he said.

A few personal goals include being an effective representative and advocate of the district by responding to calls and letters from his constituency, trying to enact legislation even though he's not a member of the majority caucus, and being a strong voice on behalf of the environment, children, and immigrants. "These are the reasons people sent me here."

DISTRICT 60B

2002 population: 36,739

Largest City: Minneapolis

County: Hennepin

Location: southwest Minneapolis

Top concern: "I think that if education is a top priority for the state, then we need to compensate teachers accordingly—particularly if we are serious about attracting bright and talented new teachers to the field. Competitive wages and benefits need to be assured."

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