

A new perspective

From parks and local development to education, Nelson brings real life experience to the House of Representatives

By PATTY JANOVEC

Rep. Carla Nelson (R-Rochester) says government is "all about who sits at the table."

Her first taste of politics was when she noticed a neighborhood being plotted without a park next to her home, which would be against a city regulation about to take effect. She spearheaded a group to work with the planning and zoning commission, and the city council to make sure a park would be built. They won, and she said of the experience, "It showed me the importance of normal average citizens being involved in their local government."

She moved on to serve on the executive board of her local Republican Party, was elected to state level positions, and has worked on a number of campaigns. After doing all of those, she said, "I never really thought about running myself."

That changed when former Rep. Dave Bishop retired, and state and community leaders urged her to run. "I enjoy working in the political arena. I know it's important, so I talked it over with my family," Nelson said. She said her 21-year-old son told her, "You have to do that Mom. You're full of integrity." With a laugh, she said she knew he'd been raised right when he told her, "It's the perfect job for you."

Former Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice A.M. "Sandy" Keith says he contributed to Nelson's campaign because "this woman is going to be great. I'm an old DFLer, and we need em' good." Along with her "political presence" she has real life experiences and is a good listener, Keith said.

He first met Nelson at the 2002 Minnesota Republican convention, and he said he was greatly impressed with how she dealt with opposing views. Nelson is pro-life, and he observed the way she spoke with pro-choice

supporters while "not offending them." Said Keith, "She has a wonderful presence that's hard to describe." Those qualities will make her a "very outstanding legislator" he said.

One of four Republican representatives from the Rochester area, Nelson serves residents "in the heart of Rochester" she said. That's appropriate since the district houses the Mayo Clinic, one of the leading health care providers in the world, she said.

Nelson brings her own set of skills in education. She has a master's degree in teacher leadership from the University of Minnesota, and she has taught elementary and secondary education classes. "Children are tied into what our future is," she said.

Education is one of the most important concerns she found on the campaign trail, she said. Before agreeing to run, she said, she

for higher education opportunities, yet the area doesn't have a comprehensive four-year university. She said the community is one of the largest cities in the nation without a four-year higher education institution.

She says she is a strong advocate for local government. "If I look at bills or policies, I always get the best results when those decisions are made at the local level." She says it's like a lens she always views policy through.

That's how she views the state's budget situation.

She says there are two key goals: The first being the need to make tough choices now. Nelson said she was elected to lead and to gather all the information to be able to make choices that are in the best interest for Minnesotans.

The second goal is to "differentiate between the revenue producers and the revenue users." Restructuring government is important so it is more efficient, effective, and programs are not duplicated, she said.

There are always several points of view to an issue, and "it's very important that you look at those different perspectives," she said. It's one of her three goals she's learned from

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specifically requested to be on House Higher Education Finance and Education Policy committees, which she is now, particularly because of her expertise in education. She's also on the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs Committee.

Also, "Rochester has a real concern and need for more higher education opportunities," she said. She explained that the city has one of the premiere two-year institutions in the region, Rochester Community and Technical College. Also private colleges, like the Twin Cities-based Augsburg College, have programs in the area, and the Mayo Clinic offers academic programs. The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system offers courses through Winona State University.

Nelson said Rochester has a real unique situation with many existing collaborative efforts

working in local government. The other two are building coalitions, and looking for win-win situations.

DISTRICT 30A

2002 population: 36,890

Largest city: Rochester

County: Olmsted

Location: southeast Minnesota

Top concern: "My personal expertise and energies are in the area of education. Education is a real concern for all Minnesotans."

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