

Health care advocate

Fritz brings lifelong compassion to St. Paul

By MATT WETZEL

Rep. Patti Fritz (DFL-Faribault) learned about politics from her father, Mike Casby, sitting with him and his friends, as they would debate issues at the kitchen table in Northfield.



Rep. Patti Fritz

news," she said.

Fritz developed a decidedly populist bent to her politics, looking to help the cause of workers and those with low and moderate-incomes. She cut her teeth working with the late Paul Wellstone on those issues, who at the time was a professor at Carleton College in Northfield.

She eventually became a licensed practical nurse and went to work at St. Lucas Care Center, a nursing home in Faribault. There she helped organize the Service Employees International Union Local 113, and became an activist for the nursing home industry. "My passion is people and helping them have opportunities," she said.

Fritz, a mother of five and grandmother of 17, initially ran for the House in 2002 against Rep. Lynda Boudreau. The local firefighters union had encouraged her to run. She lost in that election, but tried again in 2004, and won by 347 votes.

She sees jobs and health care as the key issues in her district. "I've worked with people who don't have health care. They don't qualify (because they don't meet income guidelines) and they don't want to go to the welfare department to ask for assistance because they're afraid they'll lose their dignity. I know people

DISTRICT 26B

Population: 36,496
Largest City: Faribault
Counties: Rice, Steele
Location: south-central Minnesota
Top Concern: Jobs and health care

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that are working for \$5.50 an hour. I know people who have those jobs without health care benefits," she said.

She is determined to be an advocate for those people and others who can't afford paid lobbyists. "Minimum wage gives you a minimum life. We see no opportunities, no affordable (college) education, no college scholarships."

If she could have submitted the first bill of the session it would have been a proposal to expand the medium security state prison in Faribault, which is one of the region's largest employers.