

PEOPLE

A community leader

Norton plans to stick to what constituents asked her to do

BY STEPHEN HARDING

The PTA, the school board, a degree in education and years of volunteering give Rep. Kim Norton (DFL-Rochester) a wealth of experience to share.



Rep. Kim Norton

Norton plans to stick to the basics in her freshman year at the House of Representatives: lowering property taxes, lowering tuition and getting health care costs under control. "For me it's doing what my constituents asked me to — getting along with both sides, to be a moderate and thinking of my district when I make my decisions," she said.

She spent the past eight years on the Rochester School Board, including one year

as chair. There she saw firsthand the effects of funding reductions to early childhood and K-12 education. As a mother of four children ages 16-24, she is also well aware of the effects of increased tuition costs at colleges and universities across the state.

Homelessness is a problem Norton is trying to fight, as well. "The goal is finding a way for people to help themselves, it's a hand up, not hand out," Norton said.

Last April, Norton and others went looking for homeless in Rochester at 3 a.m. and found them in parks and ditches. "I nearly walked on one man who had come off the train. He has been homeless for 20 years. He didn't see it as a problem. It was a way of life for him." Norton wants to see cheap temporary housing for people that are passing through town. "The rest of the citizens don't want to see people

DISTRICT 29B

2002 population: 36,815

Largest city: Rochester

County: Olmsted

Top concerns: Education and property taxes

sleeping in the parks."

Norton is vice chair of the House Biosciences and Emerging Technology Committee. She also serves on the House Health and Human Services Committee and the Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division of the House Finance Committee.

"I think it's important for Rochester and the University of Minnesota with its bio-diesel research. I see it's important for the state in the long run. We need to look at new technology coming in, how we can do things different and smarter. It is a visionary committee, it will affect the state 20-30 years in the future."