

Greene exits House after one term

Redistricting costs early childhood advocate a seat at the Capitol

By **BOB GEIGER**

Call her Rocky, without the gloves.

After a single session in the House, Rep. Marion Greene (DFL-Mpls) is stepping down after court-drawn redistricting mapped her into the same district as five-term Rep. Frank Hornstein (DFL-Mpls).

Greene ran against Hornstein for the DFL endorsement in the new District 61A, but bowed out after the third ballot. "We could have gone to a fourth ballot, but why bother?" she said, reflecting the conciliatory tone of the endorsement contest.

Her 2010 election meant that the first-term lawmaker entered the House in the minority caucus.

With state finances tight, Greene

chuckled when asked to name her biggest accomplishment during her lone House term.

"The things that give me the most personal satisfaction are conversations I've had about early childhood education, and trying to advance that issue," Greene said.

Several legislators worked on that issue, but didn't generate a ton of bills because they would stand little chance of passage, she said.

"If I were to come back in the majority, I would like to see some real investment in early childhood education. There are all these studies – I feel I'm like the same broken record that Art Rolnick is," Greene continued.

Rolnick, a senior fellow at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs, is a strong proponent of early childhood education.

Funding such programs is difficult for a variety of reasons, including partisan gridlock on many issues, which contributes to the frustration Greene has experienced since she took office, she said.

"There have been a lot of different times when I've been gripped by this sense that we can make positive change as a part of this group. I know when I come up the west stairs of the Capitol, I always feel like Rocky running up the steps of the Philadelphia Art Museum. It's like it's so great and there's so much possibility," Greene said.

But after reaching the Capitol's second floor, she said, "I don't want to say, 'I keep my boxing gloves on,' but maybe I do." Greene's feeling is rooted in the time-consuming, often-contentious exchanges on the House floor.

"The tenor right now is not one in which it's easy to find a group

that wants to find a middle ground to move something forward," Greene said. "That's what everybody that I've spoken to out there says they want, yet here it's just persistent partisanship. I think we're going to have to hit bottom on that before we can find a way out."

The biggest change in the legislative process during Greene's term is that few changes have been made. "I suppose what I've been able to see is the evolution of a confident majority two years ago and, now, we haven't been able to get anything done."

Minnesota's recession-strapped budget hasn't helped the situation. Nor has an absence of getting together after session adjourns to get to know each other over a sandwich or beverage.

"I used to work at the New Mexico Legislature as a staff person, and that was so much the glue of how things got done," said Greene.

Greene's advice to her successor — she assumes it will be Hornstein — is to "keep doing what he's doing. He has a fantastic track record and I think more of the same is great. The district was 70 percent mine (in area), but Frank is loved and well-known and we've always viewed ourselves as shared legislators."

As for other incoming House members, Greene said, "I probably have more interesting advice for new legislators, which would be to get things done based on your relationships. So make that a measureable part of your experience.

"The second thing is pick an area of interest and passion that hopefully overlaps with the interest and passion of people in your district and go deep on that," Greene added.

She has not yet defined her future in politics and plans to keep working in the medical industry. She worked for St. Jude Medical and Boston Scientific before being elected in 2010.

If she did return to the House, Greene said, "I'd love to be in the majority." ❧



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Rep. Marion Greene says partisanship has hampered legislative productivity.