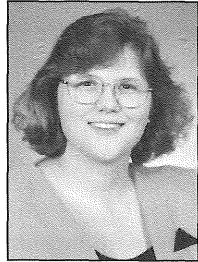


Crime fighter

Hilstrom focuses on crime prevention and supports tools for local law enforcement to track criminals

By THERESA STAHL

Rep. Debra Hilstrom (DFL-Brooklyn Center) says her foremost goal as a legislator is providing good communication for her district. And being close to her home community is something she's used to — she has lived within the same three-block area since she was a child.



Rep. Debra Hilstrom

She's also focused on making her community stronger over the long term.

"The message will be developing sustainable communities," she said.

Before her election to the House, Hilstrom spent six years on the Brooklyn Center City Council and served on the planning commission for the city.

Although new to state government, Hilstrom says she feels comfortable coming into the House because the committees on which she's serving — Crime Prevention and Judiciary Finance — are areas she was involved in as a city council member.

During her time with the city, Hilstrom worked with Brooklyn Center's police department. She says as a state representative she wants to work on crime prevention.

Brooklyn Center City Manager Mike McCauley recently recalled Hilstrom's extensive involvement with a bond referendum to build a police station and fire station. In addition, he said she had a strong emphasis on code enforcement.

Hilstrom says her involvement and good working relationship with the police department has prepared her to ask good questions and make educated decisions about law enforcement. She said she fully supports the developing CriMNet information system that would reduce crime.

"Working with the local police department in my community, I understand the need for a database that tracks predatory criminals," she said. "We need to give our officers the tools to keep

dangerous and repeat criminals off the street."

Beyond crime prevention, Hilstrom cites education and health care as her top concerns of the legislative session. McCauley said Hilstrom is active in public issues and has great interest in statewide issues.

"She's been very involved with the city and has done a great deal of work in the community," said McCauley, who has worked with Hilstrom the past five years. "She meets with people in the community and responds to questions and concerns" from her constituents.

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—Rep. Debra Hilstrom

Hilstrom, who has a sociology degree with a minor in speech communications from the University of Minnesota, also is a member of the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs Committee. She has long lists of major issues she plans to support this session.

"The DFL metro caucus will be fighting to have transportation funding, including roads, equity in transit investment, and commuter rail," she said. DFLers will be working for "affordable housing, which would include funding for maintenance and improvement to current housing, and the environment, (such as) brownfield cleanup, water quality and regional park funding."

Hilstrom ran for the Legislature when former Rep. Phil Carruthers decided not to seek re-election and people in the community urged her to run for the seat. (Carruthers who served as speaker of the House during the 1997-98 sessions — the last time DFLers held the majority in the House — accepted a position with the Ramsey County Attorney's Office.)

The campaign process for the Legislature

became a family affair for the Hilstroms. Her husband, Joel, was campaign chair, her mother was treasurer, and her father-in-law helped put up lawn signs.

Hilstrom's children, Stephanie and Jeremy, are excited for their mom to be in office. One of them appears to have already gotten the hang of running a campaign; having a lost pet, Stephanie put up signs and knocked on doors in the neighborhood.

For her children and others in her district, Hilstrom said she will concentrate on education issues: enduring equitable funding, funding special education, acquiring additional revenue on the formula, and aiding schools that suffer from teacher shortages. In her community, Hilstrom has been a part of a modern idea to improve education. She has fully supported a "virtual school district," where

school districts can come together in low-income/high need areas for the betterment of students.

Hilstrom said she will also work hard to help health care situations — prescription drugs as well as nursing homes for seniors.

McCauley, who supported much of Hilstrom's work on the city council, praised her service to her community, as well as her commitment to standing by her word.

"Debra is interested in putting citizen's concerns and welfare to the forefront and she's working very hard to address those issues," he said.

DISTRICT 47B

1998 population (estimate): 33,639

Largest city: Brooklyn Center

County: Hennepin

Location: north of Minneapolis

Top concern: "Crime prevention and education funding, as well as taking care of funding for senior's prescription expenses."

—Rep. Debra Hilstrom