

New members . . .

Larsen's priorities include crime, taxes, education

When she decided to run for the Legislature, Rep. Peg Larsen (R-Lakeland) didn't have to look far for a core of dedicated campaign workers. Her four children were enthusiastic helpers.



Rep. Peg Larsen

"They all got strongly involved in my campaign," said Larsen. "They door-knocked with me — they were probably one of my strongest support systems."

Not to mention her husband, Tom ("because he put up all my signs"), and her father-in-law, who lives with the Larsens for six months of the year.

The former mayor of Lakeland (just across the St. Croix River from Hudson, Wis.) unseated incumbent DFLer Pam Neary of Afton last November.

Larsen served four years on the Lakeland City Council, first winning an office for which no one had filed. (She launched a write-in campaign and won with 58 votes.) She was appointed mayor in 1991, and then ran unopposed for the position in 1992 with 98 percent of the vote.

Larsen said her legislative priorities reflect her constituents concerns about rising taxes and crime.

"People were concerned about the crime issue, which is kind of a surprise for Washington County — you don't think of that as a high crime area," Larsen said.

But residents in the suburbs to the east of St. Paul wondered if government had the "wisdom to prevent [crime] at early stages in

the school district, rather than just building new prisons." Construction of a new jail in Washington County generated a lot of controversy within her district, said Larsen.

Voting to bring back the death penalty in Minnesota would be an "extremely difficult decision" for Larsen.

"My bottom line is that if someone commits a heinous crime against society, it is not our responsibility to feed and educate and take care of that person for the rest of their life," she explained.

Larsen concedes that "there's no middle ground — either you're going to have the death penalty or you're not. At this point in time I would probably vote in favor of the death penalty."

Government efficiency and holding the line on taxes will be at the top of Larsen's legislative agenda. With her teaching experience and four children in the public schools, education issues will also get a lot of attention.

"Each school district and each school within the district has certain needs and they can't be mandated by the state," said Larsen, adding that school districts should be "free to use their funds as they need them, whether they need computers, or new desks, or textbooks."

While she's lived in Minnesota for 23 years, Larsen originally hails from Pittsburgh and attended the University of Slippery Rock in Pennsylvania.

Her varied career includes being the director of recreation and volunteer services in a home for the chronically ill and working as a clinical service manager at the Hennepin

County Medical Center. She also worked at the Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority.

Larsen married and stayed at home for a time while raising her son and three daughters. For the past four years, Larsen worked as an educational assistant with kindergarten and first grade special needs students in the Stillwater schools.

"We had children who ranged from autistic to mildly retarded," she said. "I learned quite a bit from those kids. They give you a wonderful perspective on life and a smile that could warm your heart."

Larsen admits to falling in love with Minnesota and is dedicated to maintaining its "quality of life" for her children and their generation.

She said she will judge legislation by how it improves the lives of her constituents: "Those are the people who put me here. But I think you also have to be able to look past that and see how it's going to affect the entire state of Minnesota."

—Mordecai Specktor

District 56B

Population: 32,555

Distribution: 74.52 percent urban; 25.48 percent rural

County: Washington

Largest city: Woodbury (portion)

Location: east Metro

Unemployment rate: 3.32 percent

Residents living below poverty level: 3.61 percent

1992 presidential election results:

Bush/Quayle 32.87 percent

Clinton/Gore 39.95 percent

Perot/Stockdale 26.12 percent

Other: 1.06 percent

Committee deadlines

If you're following a bill that has yet to receive a hearing in the Legislature this session, you've got plenty of time. The first committee deadline is more than six weeks off.

Each year the House and Senate set deadlines by which most bills must be heard by a committee. The deadlines serve to weed out some of the several thousand bills introduced each year.

The first committee deadline is **Friday, March 31**. That means all bills must be passed out of all policy

committees in their house of origin to receive further consideration this session. If a House bill hasn't been approved by House policy committees by the deadline, but its Senate companion has, the bill has met the committee deadline.

By the second committee deadline — **Friday, April 7** — all bills other than those containing appropriations, must be passed out of all policy committees in both the House and the Senate. The deadline does not apply to the finance committees/divisions

or the Rules and Legislative Administration Committee, the Taxes Committee, and the Ways and Means Committee.

By **Friday, April 21**, all appropriations bills must clear their policy and finance committees and move to the Ways and Means Committee.

Of course, there are exceptions to the deadlines. Any lawmaker may try to convince the Rules and Legislative Administration Committee, which includes leaders from both party caucuses, to hear a bill after the deadlines.