

Lawmaker begins career with popular auto emissions bill

By Paul Wahl

First-term Rep. Barbara Haake (R-Mounds View) ran for a seat in the House for the first time in 1976, shortly after the Watergate scandal and the resignation of Richard Nixon.



Rep. Barbara Haake

The next time she ran, it was Bill Clinton who was under scrutiny for his actions as president.

"I only run in years when presidents are experiencing catastrophic difficulties," Haake joked.

The 58-year-old mother of three entered the race in District 52B after fellow Republican Richard Pellow retired from politics. Pellow and DFLer Geri Evans had traded places in the House seat several times. Pellow won the seat in 1988, 1990, and 1994, but Evans took it away from him in 1992 and 1996.

In 1998, Haake took on the incumbent, Evans, and a Reform Party candidate. Haake won by 800 votes over her nearest competitor.

For her, running for office was a natural progression from a long period of political involvement. Haake's interest in politics can be traced back to her childhood, when she learned on the knee of her grandmother, a devoted Republican Party activist whose political involvement began long before women's suffrage.

In 1970, a chapter of the League of Women Voters was started in Haake's community. Then a stay-at-home mother, Haake jumped at the chance to join. The group offered an opportunity to talk about something other than "baby bottles and diapers," she said.

Later, she joined the park and recreation commission in Mounds View and was then appointed to the city's planning commission. She spent nearly a decade on those two bodies and later served one-half term on the Mounds View City Council.

In 1994, she joined the Rice Creek Watershed District Board of Managers.

Her involvement with her local cable television committee in 1990 led to her debut as a television show host. She began as the host of a monthly production about activities and personalities in Mounds View, "A View from the Mound" and "A Conversation with the Mayor." She also has co-anchored the yearly election night coverage for CTV's entire northern Ramsey County suburban area. In the past two years, she has been co-host of another CTV show, "Car Stuff."

She continues her role in television today, hosting "Barb's Report from the Hill," which is videotaped in the Capitol or State Office Building each week and features a variety of legislative colleagues as guests.

It wasn't her work on "Car Stuff" that led to her first major piece of legislation, but the auto experience probably came in handy. Haake is sponsoring a well-publicized bill that would end the motor vehicle emissions inspection program in the metropolitan area.

"It is fun because it's a popular cause," Haake said.

She believes the House and Senate will pass the bill and Gov. Jesse Ventura will sign it.

Haake is working on several other pieces of legislation as a member of the House Transportation Policy Committee. She also serves on the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs, House Crime Prevention, and House Transportation Finance committees.

She will also chair a subcommittee that will examine issues relating to the Metropolitan Council.

For the past 11 years, Haake has owned her own insurance agency, helping employers provide employee benefits to their workers.

She finds the life of a legislator exciting, but occasionally frustrating. She said that because she's been self-employed or employed in self-directed positions for most of her life, the loss

of autonomy has been the most difficult of the adjustments she's had to make.

"You have no more control of your life," she said. "It's nice to paint a room because you start at one corner and end at another and say, 'I've accomplished something.' I can't get that feeling yet. Maybe it will come later on."

Weeks during the legislative session seem to pass as quickly as days do away from the Capitol, Haake said. She gets home around 10:30 p.m. most weekday evenings and often spends time on weekends catching up. She's often up by 4 a.m. to prepare for the day and usually arrives at her office early.

Although she's finding that keeping in communication with her constituents can be challenging, one of her main goals is to bring people into the equation in state government.

"I get back to my community and that's where the people are," Haake said. "Here you're insulated."

"Agencies and lobbyists have a lot of control over what happens here. It seems almost as if the citizens — my people — are a voice in the wilderness. Sometimes it's tough for them to be heard."

Although she doesn't plan to retire shortly, Haake has a major leisure adventure waiting. She owns a 65-foot boat with 1,800 square-feet of living space. Eventually, she wants to sail down the Mississippi River and travel to Florida each October and return in April.

"That's if I ever retire, which I don't see myself doing," she said.

District 52B

1995 population: 33,290
Largest city: New Brighton
County: Ramsey
Location: northwestern metro
Top concern: "I want to give the people a voice. If I can be a facilitator for my community and my people, then I will have accomplished something."
 — Rep. Barb Haake

Frequently called numbers

(All numbers are area code 651.)

Secretary of the Senate
 231 Capitol 296-0271
 Voice mail/order bills 296-2343
Chief Clerk of the House
 211 Capitol 296-2314

Index, Senate
 110 Capitol 296-2887
Index, House
 211 Capitol 296-6646
Information, Senate
 231 Capitol 296-0504

Information, House
 175 State Office Building 296-2146
TTY*, Senate 296-0250
 Toll free 1-888-234-1112
TTY*, House 296-9896
 Toll free 1-800-657-3550