

Back to her roots

After 10 years, Rep. Linda Wejcman is leaving the House to return to her pursuits in her south Minneapolis community

BY CHRIS VETTER

Rep. Linda Wejcman (DFL-Mpls) got her first taste of politics in her own south Minneapolis neighborhood where she and her neighbors worked to close an adult bookstore.

After 10 years in the Legislature, Wejcman plans to return her focus to helping neighbors and strengthening her community.

Wejcman, 60, a native of Spencer, Iowa, moved to the Twin Cities for the first time in 1961, then went back to Iowa before making a permanent move to south Minneapolis 10 years later.

She has lived in the same home with her husband, Jim, for the past 25 years. It wasn't long after she moved to Minneapolis when she became involved in trying to close the adult bookstore because, she said, the shop drew unwanted people to the neighborhood who

harassed neighborhood residents. laws?" Wejcman said. "I think building community is the best possible thing I can do now."

Wejcman wants to work on drug and gang issues, and to help people become "positive attributes" to the community.

"I want to help people understand the goodness in themselves and work on that," she said.

While her urban district faces poverty and crime problems, Wejcman is upbeat about the smart and determined youth of her community. She speaks passionately about how the young people in her district are opening their minds to their own abilities to improve conditions in the area.

"Our district is so exciting, just because of the diversity," she says.

During her tenure in the Legislature, Wejcman focused on health and human service issues. She

backed an unsuccessful effort to create a consumer protection office where people could call and complain about problems with their health care provider or health maintenance organization.

"People don't know where to go for help," Wejcman said. "This would have been an office with real power."

Wejcman sponsored a 1997 bill that established a fathers'

registry for people who believe they may be the father of a child who may be offered for adoption. The registry provides that the man will be notified of a pending adoption and will have a chance to argue for his right to custody in a court hearing.

Fathers who do not register within a certain time lose their right to later challenge an adoption. The goal is to allow adoptive parents to be sure that the adoption will not be overturned later by an absent biological parent.

In 1997, Wejcman was named speaker pro tempore, which meant she assumed the role of the speaker when then-Speaker Phil Carruthers (DFL-Brooklyn Center) left the podium. She also served as head of the Minneapolis delegation in the Legislature.

Rep. Karen Clark (DFL-Mpls), who serves a district that neighbors Wejcman's, spoke highly of Wejcman's commitment to helping others.

"She's worked hard to empower people in south Minneapolis," Clark said. "She has a good sense of humor. I think she brings people together."

Clark cited work on human services, curtailing prostitution, improving housing, and the patients' bill of rights proposal as Wejcman's chief marks in the Legislature.

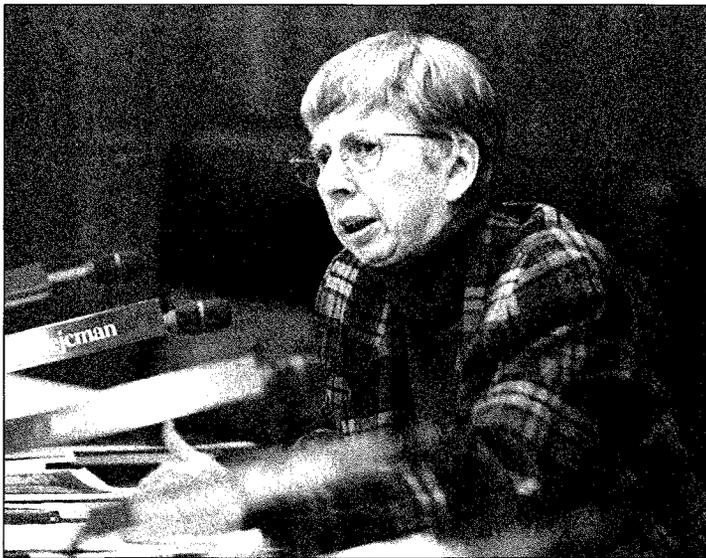
Although Wejcman comes from an urban district, she jumped at the opportunity to serve on an agriculture committee this year. She cited the parallels between her district and rural Minnesota — arguing that people in both areas share economic, employment, and environmental concerns.

Rep. Ted Winter (DFL-Fulda) worked with Wejcman on the House Agriculture Policy Committee. He said she "is giving people a helping hand up and out of poverty."

"Her sense of caring and her realistic approach to legislation" are her memorable attributes, Winter said. "She's always been positive, always up front."

Even if the DFL were to regain majority status in the House in the November elections, Wejcman said she wouldn't regret her decision to leave.

"My decision was, it's time to move on and do some more hands-on work," she said, reflecting on her decade at the Capitol. "For me, that's long enough." 



harassed neighborhood residents.

"We did a lot of picketing and protesting," Wejcman recalls. "It was meant to let (the owners) know that neighbors didn't appreciate it."

That focus on community improvement is where Wejcman's future lies. She started thinking about leaving the Legislature and focusing on community issues after the 1998 election.

"Being in the minority was so different. I started to think, could I get more done working with people rather than trying to pass

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Linda Wejcman
DFL

District 61B – Minneapolis
Terms: 5

Career notes: Perhaps the best known legislation Wejcman sponsored was a 1997 measure that created a registry for men who believe they may be the father of a child that could be placed for adoption. The aim was to prevent cases where a biological father comes on the scene much later and tries to overturn an adoption.