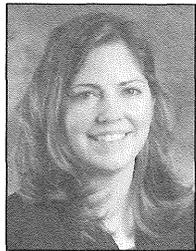


Classroom experience

A teacher by trade, Klinzing looks to teach the importance of educational reform as new member of the House

By MIRANDA BRYANT

Rep. Karen Klinzing (R-Woodbury) didn't waste any time in her new role as state representative from District 56B. The day after being sworn in she was meeting with House researchers about potential education reform legislation.



Rep. Karen Klinzing

The 32-year-old mother of two has been a teacher for 10 years in the Bloomington school district, teaching high school civics, economics, world history, and American history. Klinzing also taught for one year at a charter school at Fort Snelling State Park. She is passionate about education, and specifically about creating and maintaining educational choices.

"Education is such a personal thing – everybody learns differently, everybody has different values," Klinzing said in a recent interview.

While the representative didn't give specific details about the education reform legislation she may sponsor, she said she generally aims to broaden a family's schooling choice by creating funding alternatives. This could take the form of tax credits, vouchers, or tax cuts. At a minimum, the charter school system could be expanded while post-secondary options and open enrollment legislation are maintained, Klinzing said.

The problem as she sees it is that Minnesota has open enrollment legislation, but the choice provided by it doesn't extend equitably to private school customers. They are charged twice – once by the private school tuition and again by their mandated tax support of public schools.

"We're creating a situation where only the rich can afford to send their kids to a private school and everybody else gets a one-size-fits-all," she said.

The state and federal governments have long been increasing education funding, but Klinzing said she is only seeing more administrators, administrative assistants, manuals,

studies, and teacher curriculum days.

"I'm not seeing any direct impact on the classroom because of money," she said. "I'm not seeing the students happier. I'm not seeing the parents happier."

Though Klinzing has long been enthusiastic about education, she said, she was given little time to use that energy as a catapult to elected office. When the Republican candidate in her district unexpectedly pulled out of the race in June, party leaders sought Klinzing. They had been impressed by a speech she gave at the Republican Party's Senate District 56 convention.

Klinzing had only two days to decide if she would run for office.

"I said, 'This is an opportunity that can't be missed,'" Klinzing said.

But Klinzing's political aspirations

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originally surfaced in the midst of a Wisconsin snowstorm while she was a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She and her classmates in a political science course were electing a mock legislature. The blizzard kept away all but Klinzing and three others from the class-appointed election. "So we all elected each other for leadership," said Klinzing, who became the Senate president. "I found it absolutely fascinating."

The freshman legislator has already gained the respect of key state legislators in Minnesota. House Republican caucus leaders selected her to be one of seven assistant majority leaders.

Peg Larsen, the former representative for what is now District 56A, said Klinzing is going to do good work at the Capitol.

"There are three qualities that come to mind when I think about her," Larsen said. "One is sincerity, and the other is honesty, and the

other is experience. She has the kind of experience in the educational field that is very much needed in this session."

Appointed to the committees of education finance, education policy, and local government and metropolitan affairs, Klinzing will be able to demonstrate those qualities.

Klinzing said she requested to the local government assignment because she believes in the principles of a smaller, limited government, and endorses capitalism and the free market. These ideas carry over into her philosophy of keeping taxes at the most local level so that citizens can better participate in the process.

Klinzing said she believes the state should hold the line on taxes, even at the risk of cities and counties raising their taxes in response. "At the local level citizens have more of a voice, or at least see it and know they can go down to city hall," she said. "In Woodbury most people know the mayor."

She also said she is anxious to delve into the metropolitan affairs side of the committee. Klinzing said she finds it odd that the Metropolitan Council has told Woodbury to stop growing while telling Lake Elmo to "get going." Woodbury is expanding at such a rate that the

sewer and water infrastructure may reach capacity. Conversely, Lake Elmo wants to keep its three-acre lots.

Said Klinzing, "From a big-picture perspective it's ironic to have a state advisory board giving contradictory messages to neighboring communities."

DISTRICT 56B

2002 population: 36,683

Largest city: Woodbury

County: Washington

Location: southeastern Twin Cities suburbs

Top concern: "Obviously a top concern is the budget and that was a main concern of mine going into this."

— Rep. Karen Klinzing