

New members . . .

## House tries Harder to make government efficient

Rep. Elaine Harder took on a challenging task in her first run for public office.

Harder (IR-Jackson) entered the race for the District 22B seat prepared to face a powerful four-term DFL incumbent, former Assistant Majority Leader Katy Olson.



Rep. Elaine Harder

Harder's battle plans changed when Olson announced her retirement at the end of the 1994 session. Instead of running against her opponent's record, Harder focused on putting forth a clear agenda to voters in her conservative-leaning southwestern Minnesota district.

She engineered a campaign that included six county fairs and 18 parades to win the three-way race. "The timing was excellent," Harder said. "People were ready for the kind of message I was bringing to them."

Harder supports term limits for legislators and efforts to reduce the size of government and to hold the line on taxes or make cuts. But she does not want those cuts to hurt the public education system, an area in which she believes the state should provide more funding.

Harder said she learned many of her political values while growing up on a Westbrook farm, which sits just outside the district she represents.

She left the farm to attend Mankato State University and has built a diverse resumé

since graduating with a bachelor's degree in secondary education.

Harder has worked as a home economics teacher, a sales representative for a printing and office supplies company, a sales and marketing agent for her family's purebred and feeder cattle company, and, most recently, as a 4-H youth development agent with the University of Minnesota Extension Service in Cottonwood County.

Her involvement in 4-H in Cottonwood County stretches back to her youth. In fact, that's how she met her husband, Ron.

The couple experienced life on the campaign trail when Ron ran unsuccessfully for the state Senate in 1990.

That campaign ignited political fires in Harder that eventually led her into a run for the House.

Running for office was another step in a new direction in a life of community involvement. In the past, Harder had served as Jackson County Fair Board secretary, working with farm and 4-H families and youth. In connection with the fair, she was one of the original volunteers in establishing the Pioneer Village, a project that developed over nearly two decades. Harder's work involved collecting items of historical significance, which are now on display in the village.

She and her husband, who have two children, own and operate an insurance agency in Jackson, and, in what free time there is, she enjoys photography and singing in her church choir.

During her early days in office, Harder is concerned about some of the demands placed on state government.

Sitting on House committees, Harder has found herself "frustrated with the concept that for every problem, government is expected to have a financial answer," she said.

Harder said she would like to focus on making government more efficient by eliminating duplications, such as having some 20 agencies dealing with some aspect of violence prevention.

"I know it will be painful when we cut," Harder said. "We're talking about people's jobs. We're talking about people's services. People realize it's necessary, but it's going to be difficult."

— Nick Healy

### District 22B

**Population:** 32,898

**Distribution:** 23.84 percent urban, 76.16 percent rural

**Counties:** Brown, Cottonwood, Jackson, Martin, Redwood, Watonwan

**Largest city:** Windom

**Location:** southwestern Minnesota

**Unemployment rate:** 4.32 percent

**Residents living below poverty level:** 13.21 percent

**1992 presidential election results:**

Bush/Quayle ..... 34.09 percent

Clinton/Gore ..... 36.79 percent

Perot/Stockdale ..... 27.78 percent

Other: ..... 1.34 percent

Gov. Arne Carlson has proposed that the state pay \$183.7 million in the next fiscal year for the state's correctional institutions.

That's a far cry from the \$3.3 million the state paid in fiscal year 1955.

Back then the state had only five correctional institutions — about half the number that exist today — to support, and they were dramatically different.

Further, there were only about 1,200 inmates in 1955 — about a quarter of the 4,765 adult and juvenile inmates that are incarcerated today.

Delinquent boys were then sent to the "training school at Red Wing," which had a dairy farm, elementary school, and a few high school courses. Training was offered in blacksmithing, meatcutting, and

pipefitting, among other skills.

When the boys are discharged from the school, "most of them are prepared to live a normal life in society," wrote Joseph Kise in his 1959 book, *Minnesota's Government*.

Today, only the state's toughest youthful offenders are sent to the Red Wing facility. Before they arrive, each juvenile has committed an average of 13 prior offenses. According to a recent Legislative Auditor's report, up to 75 percent will reoffend upon release.

In the 1950s, the Home School for Girls at Sauk Centre offered opportunities in "gardening, beauty culture, sewing, business relations and other vocations."

## It's a fact!

There were 196 girls at the school in August 1957. "Only a few of the girls have been sent back after they are released. The officers and employees try to make the place congenial and homelike."

And while the crime problem facing the state was not as severe as it is today, the 34-year-old opinion of Kise is echoed today: "These institutions cost the State of Minnesota millions and millions of dollars each year. In addition, much money is spent in local communities for the upkeep of county and city jails. From a strictly economic viewpoint, these facts show that it pays to spend money for preventive measures. The public is learning that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."