PROFILE: NORTH DAKOTA SENATOR
JUDY LEE

After nearly 30 years as a legislator, longtime leader on health policy values two parts of the job above all else — ‘the problem solving and the people’

by Laura Tomaska (ltomaska@csg.org)

Judy Lee has never been one to spend much time on hobbies. “I don’t watch soaps; I don’t bowl; I don’t play games,” she says. She has an array of pastimes at all, it’s problem-solving, and nearly 30 years ago, the North Dakota native found the perfect outlet to pursue it — as a member of the state legislature.

“This is all scientific method,” Lee says. “I learned that from the best chemistry teacher in high school, and everything works that way.

“Being in the legislature, you look at what the problem is, and you do the research you need to do to figure out what the potential solutions might be. … Which option looks most likely to succeed?”

That approach applies to darn near everything.

As good a fit as legislating has turned out to be for Lee, she wasn’t initially drawn to the work. She instead was drawn in — identified by others as a potentially strong candidate and legislator thanks to her many years of community service (League of Women Voters, Chamber of Commerce, work for hospice, senior living centers, vocational training, etc.) and more than a decade on West Fargo’s Planning and Zoning Commission.

In 1994, Lee was asked by her departing state senator to run for his seat. But at the time, as a mother with two college-aged children and a full-time job in real estate, she balked at the idea.

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