

Celebrating Chartering @ 30 – MINNESOTA'S STORY

While Senator Reichgott was meeting with opponents of charter schools to find “some middle ground” in the Houses, the House Education Committee Chair Rep. Bob McEachern had made it clear that he opposed charter schools. In a 2011 interview, Rep. Kelso, the chief author, explained: *“Rep. McEachern thought (chartering) was a stupid idea... He looked at things from a core set of principles. He was opposed to vouchers, and he saw charter schools as a form of vouchers. End of story. There was no changing his mind. ... He was a key person on the house side that was adamantly and inalterably opposed. Everyone knew exactly as he was thinking.”*

Given this reality, Rep. Kelso only asked for an informational hearing on her bill instead of a vote, which she was convinced would have been defeated if it had a vote. The bill did get a hearing at the end of a two- hour committee meeting where five other bills were held.

In that same 2011 interview, Rep. Kelso stated, *“The hearing did not make much of an impression on me. I think the predictable people said the predictable things. There was never a lot of interest in charter schools on the house side. ... The whole establishment was opposed to the idea, but not stirred up about it. My feel was that the teachers never got riled up about this My cynical suspicion was that someone pretty important somewhere along the line told them [not to worry because] it wasn't going to happen.”*

The limited time for testimony at the end of the hearing meant not everyone got to testify, but people could and did submit written testimony. Among the supporters of chartering was **Mindy Greiling**, chair of the Roseville Area School Board; *“From my perspective as a school board member, I support applying for charters from either the [Minnesota State] Board of Education or the local board. ... I encourage you to give every consideration to liberate willing schools. I believe that enabling charter schools to exist would also provide a catalyst for real change with the system that would benefit all students, I urge you to vote for HF 773.”*

Rep. Kelso knew that without the support of Rep. McEachern, the opposition of the establishment, and the fact that the informational hearing did not get much attention or have much impact, the only way for charter schools to become a reality was through the senate including chartering as a provision in their omnibus bill.

In that 2011 interview she stated, *“It was crystal clear to me, from whenever I decided to get*

involved in this, that the only hope for this was to have it come out of the senate omnibus bill in the conference committee."

However, charters would only have a chance at being in the final conference committee omnibus if at least 3 of the 5 house conferees were supporters of charter schools. The eventual decision on who would be the house conferees rested with the Speaker of the House, Rep. Robert Vanasek, whose position on charters was not known to Rep. Kelso at the time.

Historical Note: Mindy Greiling would be elected to the MN House of Representatives in 1992 and eventually serve as the Chair of the House Education Finance Committee. She served in the MN Legislature until 2013.

Next Week: The future of chartering rests in the Senate.



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