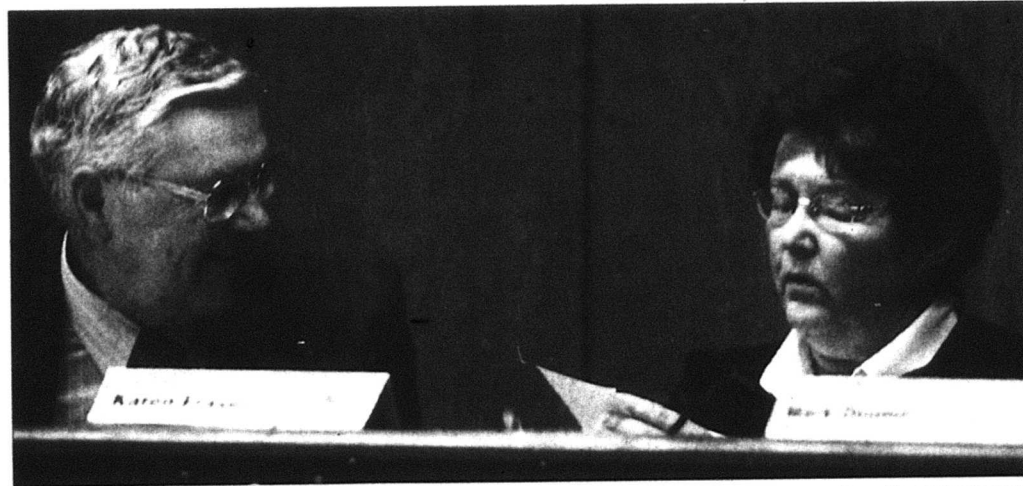


Fraser chooses efficiency over flash

State senator climbed ranks from Lacey City Council post

BY PATRICK CONDON
THE OLYMPIAN



Steve Bloom/The Olympian

Sen. Karen Fraser, D-Thurston County, talks with Sen. Bob Morton, R-Kettle Falls, chairman of the Natural Resources, Energy and Water Committee, during a briefing on an Okanogan County rehydration project.

Karen Fraser

- **Age:** 58
- **Residence:** Thurston County
- **Family:** Husband, Tim Malone; one daughter.
- **Education:** Bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Washington
- **Occupation:** Legislator; former legislative liaison for several state agencies
- **Political experience:** Lacey City Council, 1973-80; Lacey mayor, 1976-80; Thurston County Commission, 1981-88; Washington House of Representatives, 1989-92; Washington State Senate, 1993-present.

spurred by what is still her biggest motivator: finding solutions that work toward a common good.

"I have an attitude that we're all in this together," Fraser said. "Our lives are interconnected. We have to find a way to make things work and have the best possible society."

Upon graduating from college, Fraser came to Olympia to work as an intern for what was then known as the House Health and Welfare Committee. After the session ended, she stayed on briefly as the first female nonclerical employ-

ee of the Legislative Council, which pre-dated the mostly partisan caucus staff that now helps lawmakers shape state policy.

Fraser recalls how different the Legislature was in those days. It was more collegial, she said, with lawmakers of both parties regularly socializing.

"There used to be a lot more parties," Fraser said. "The pace is much more intense now. But they got the job done back then. A lot of historic work was done during those years."

"Karen is one of the hardest-working legislators up here, and I respect her a lot. I think a lot of our problems could be solved with better understanding and more hard work to come up with solutions — and Karen does that."

—Sen. Dan Swecker,
R-Rochester

in such wonkish arenas as pension policy and environmental stewardship.

In addition to a valuable seat on the budget-setting Ways and Means Committee, Fraser up until this session chaired the Natural Resources, Energy and Water Committee. With the Republican takeover of the Senate this year, she has lost her gavel — but says she can still have an imprint on the creation of state policy.

Those on the opposite end of the ideological spectrum say a lifetime of government surroundings has given Fraser a few blind spots.

"I wish she had a little experience in the private sector, because I truly think she doesn't understand how it works and how it can contribute to solutions," said Sen. Dan Swecker, R-Rochester.

Even though Fraser's politics put her to the left of most of her colleagues, many — Swecker included — say they appreciate her serious approach to lawmaking and her commitment to mastering policy details.

"Karen is one of the hardest-working legislators up here, and I respect her a lot," Swecker said. "I think a lot of our problems could be solved with better understanding and more hard work to come up with solutions — and Karen does that."



never been the flashiest politician. She has watched as numerous colleagues from the Olympia area's deep political culture have gone on to Congress or statewide political office. She isn't given to fiery floor speeches or grandstanding news conferences — you're more likely to see her sitting quietly at committee hearings, taking copious notes in shorthand.

"I imagine she's got a great file cabinet of all these notes she's taken. No one can read them but her," Hunt said. "But you know it pays off when she can say, 'We tried that 15 years ago, and it didn't work then, either.'"

Unlike many legislators, Fraser didn't grow up in a particularly political family. A Seattle native, she became interested in policy while attending the University of Washington in the late 1960s,