

A FEW MINUTES WITH

# Sen. Julie Rosen

## Drug-related issues are her priority.

BY MELISSA MRACHEK

Being christened “Senator Meth” might not seem like a compliment, but Sen. Julie Rosen (R-Fairmont) wears the edgy moniker like a badge of honor.

In 2005, Rosen and a task force of about 30 people helped pass legislation aimed at addressing the top five factors contributing to the burgeoning meth epidemic in Minnesota. One provision removed pseudoephedrine-based cold and allergy medications, which can be used to manufacture meth, from store shelves and placed them behind pharmacy counters.

Rosen worked for two years to convince lawmakers to pass the bill. Thus, colleagues began referring to her as “Senator Meth.”

“That bill set the tone for addressing meth across the nation,” she says. “I was asked to speak in many other states about how we worked with law enforcement and other key groups to get it done.”

Rosen is one of a handful of state lawmakers who have zeroed in on health-care related issues during their tenure at the Capitol. In addition to fighting the meth epidemic, she has also been a player in combating prescription opioid abuse—one of several MMA priorities for the 2014 legislative session.

Rosen believes stopping opioid abuse will require the involvement of a number of stakeholders. “To make significant changes, whether it’s a prescription



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monitoring program or treatment dealing with methadone clinics, you have to make sure everyone is at the table. The worst thing we can do is force through legislation,” she says, adding that it takes a lot of money to eventually fix poorly conceived legislation.

### Marijuana and Minnesota

Colorado, ground zero in the marijuana debate, is Rosen’s home state. She grew up among the Rocky Mountains, went to college at Colorado State University and still has family in the Fort Collins area. As a go-to lawmaker on drug-related legislation, she will likely be at the table if the issue of medical marijuana comes up in Minnesota.

When asked what she thinks about Colorado’s decision to legalize marijuana, she mentions that not one of her relatives voted for the Constitutional amendment. “I am absolutely, 100 percent opposed to legalizing marijuana,” she says.

Some argue that medical marijuana can provide relief to people living with chronic pain. Rosen, however, says she believes there are other viable options. And that’s where the medical community can contribute to the debate.

“When you stop listening to the advice of adolescent psychologists [who oppose medical marijuana], when you stop listening to law enforcement and to the treatment world, I have a problem with that,” she says.

## MNsure and the session ahead

Aside from drug-related issues, Rosen will be keeping an eye on the ongoing struggles of MNsure, the state's health insurance exchange. She says she will continue to work with legislators on both sides of the aisle to improve the website.

"I honestly wish it was working the way it is supposed to," she says. "I was not comfortable with the [MNsure] bill, but I stood at the press conference a year ago to say, 'I want to work on this and make this thing work.'"

Rosen says she feels MNsure was unnecessary because Minnesota was already leading the way in terms of residents having health insurance coverage. According to the Census Bureau, 8.7 percent of Minnesotans lacked health insurance in 2011-12; the national rate for the same period was 15.4 percent.

"We have such progressive, all-inclusive health care in our state anyway," she says. "Most states look at us and want to mirror what we had in our health care reform in 2008—coordinated care, consumer-driven health care—and now we have just complicated it with something, I feel, is going to take a lot of money to fix. And I don't know if it can be fixed."

## Doctors know best

Rosen encourages physicians to speak up on issues related to health care. "Physicians are the experts in their field and can provide information on trends and what they are seeing," she says. "We can make a big mess at the Capitol if we don't have the best people in the field coming to us and sharing their perspective."

Her key piece of advice for physicians who wish to get involved in legislative issues: "Pick your battle." She advises them to be strategic and targeted in their message and address problems that are on the table. "Don't come to us talking about universal health care—that is the last thing Republicans in general want to hear," she says.

What keeps Rosen from becoming frustrated and disheartened by politics is talking with people she represents. "I fall in love with my job all over again when I get back out in my district," she says. "You can start to spin on yourself at the Capitol thinking you are doing the right thing, and then you get home and you understand it's more complicated. It's not about your ego or winning; it's about doing the right thing for your state, your district and your constituents."

# Is that necessary?

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