

Olympia's 'Iron Lady' puts steel in state GOP

At 72, Jeannette Hayner runs Senate with firm hand

By Larry Werner
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OLYMPIA — The force that muscles laws through the marbled state Senate is hidden in a circle of men. There in their midst, handing out instructions with a wag of one finger, is a 5-foot, 3-inch-tall woman.

At 72, Republican Majority Leader Jeannette Hayner rules the Senate with a firmness that has earned her an occasional comparison to former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. At other times, she's shoot-from-the-hip Annie Oakley.

Hayner, a lawyer from Walla Walla, loves it all.

"I'm flattered by that," she says, flashing a kindly smile that might lead the uninitiated to envision this grandmother knitting instead of holding one of the most powerful posts in the capital.

But as the first woman to hold the Senate's top leadership post, Hayner possesses a toughness (some critics would call it ruthless determination) that even Eng-

Faces in the Capitol

land's Iron Lady might admire.

On budgetary issues, she has squared off unblinkingly with Gov. Booth Gardner and House Speaker Joe King, both Democrats, while blocking the governor's efforts on tax increases and tax reform.

She held out tenaciously last year on a wide-ranging growth management plan, eventually restricting it to urban counties and appeasing the Senate GOP's power base in Eastern Washington, where talk of growth control was highly unpopular.

"Her staying power is phenomenal," says Sen. Marcus Gaspard, D-Sumner, the leader of the Democrat minority.

Hayner demanded adamantly last year that \$260 million of what seemed like a cornucopia of excess state revenues be

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GRANT M. HALLER/P-I
GOP's Jeannette Hayner: "Her staying power is phenomenal," her chief Democratic opponent says.

Hayner: She pushed for reserve account to be set up

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placed in a not-to-be-tapped reserve account.

With the economic uncertainties of war in the Persian Gulf, she can now enjoy the confidence of seeming far-sighted.

"I'm so glad we insisted on that," says Hayner. "The Democrats didn't want any rainy-day fund."

She is not accustomed to letting obstacles stand in the way of what she wants.

She was one of eight women students in her first year of law school at the University of Oregon in Eugene. At Jefferson High School in Portland, she was the only female on the golf team.

Elected to the House in 1972 and the Senate in 1976, she led the Republicans through tumultuous times when the party gained control of the Senate in 1981, lost it in 1983 and regained it in 1987.

As a lawmaker, she enjoys avid support from business, from whom she receives the bulk of her campaign financing.

In her last election in 1988, her biggest contributors were the Washington Medical Association (\$4,350), the Boeing Co. (\$3,500), the Atlantic Richfield Co. (\$2,100), Pacific Northwest Bell (\$2,050), the Washington State Dental Association (\$1,700) and AT&T West (\$1,200).

Her personal assets include real estate in Eastern Washington

assessed at more than \$450,000 and stock ownership in AT&T, New York and U S West in Denver, records filed with the Public Disclosure Commission show.

The experience of leading a minority party to budget-setting majority status has not been lost on her.

When errant members of Hayner's own party have individual agendas that could pose a threat to overall GOP aims, they can find themselves cornered and getting an earful from her. Almost without exception, they return to the fold.

Hayner maintains the same discipline in her GOP caucus, which holds a one-vote majority over Democrats. Her "Rule of 13," infamous among Democrats, prohibits the GOP caucus from taking a position on any issue unless there are 13 of the 25 Republicans willing to vote for it.

Democrats find that authoritarian.

"She has been able to have an amazing amount of discipline in her caucus that has been admirable," says Gaspard. "But it's also disappointing from the point of view that many of her caucus members feel differently on a lot of issues, but they are forced by their caucus not to vote on those issues."

Hayner dismisses such notions. In her view, the idea that a majority of Republicans must agree before putting their slim

majority on the line is a democratic — as in representative — way of operating.

"They are free to make up their own minds," she says.

But her influence on the way her members make up their minds is substantial. When Gov. Gardner asked the Legislature this session to pass a malicious-harassment law to crack down on hate crimes, Hayner said she opposed the measure because of its emphasis on homosexuals.

As of this week, not a single Republican senator had agreed to sign the legislation.

Yet some bumps have appeared in the smooth facade of Republican unity this session.

Traffic jams made temporarily more nightmarish by the closure of Interstate 90 after the collapse of the old I-90 bridge have brought voter pressure on Republicans from west of the Cascades.

Sen. Peter von Reichbauer, R-Dash Point, in light of those problems, is sponsoring legislation to reform the Department of Transportation. He is one member of her caucus who has spoken the normally unspeakable.

"In the Puget Sound area, people were defeated in the last election because of issues like transportation," he says. "Jeanette has to realize that while it may not be important in Eastern Washington, it is to those of us from the Puget Sound region."

Even Sen. Dan McDonald, R-

Bellevue, chairman of the budget-setting Senate Ways and Means Committee and a staunch Hayner ally, admits, "There are different views on that issue."

Hayner dismisses a split among Republican senators over any issue.

Despite economic fears from the Persian Gulf war, Hayner remains confident about the state's budget, but in characteristic fashion, she predicts any delays in settling on one will come from the Democrats.

Reform is a word that is on Hayner's lips a lot this legislative session as she tries to paint the GOP as a party of reform on such issues as education and campaign financing, areas to which Democrats also have laid claim.

Her critics find it ironic Hayner would talk of reform when Senate Republicans have blocked legislation on such issues as growth management, transportation, malicious harassment and social services.

Responds Hayner: "We don't want change for the sake of change. We want something that will make the system better, not worse."

Let others call it status quo, she says, but in Hayner's view, the system is working for the most part. And Hayner has one thing she says she will contribute, despite criticism.

"I'm always an optimist," she says.