Karin Housley is always up for taking on a new challenge and trying something new. Two decades ago, that mindset led to the writing of a successful book, an investment guide for women with an unforgettable title — “Chicks Laying Nest Eggs: How 10 Skirts Beat the Pants Off Wall Street... And How You Can Too!” The title came from the name of the investment club that she had formed with friends and relatives.

“During that process, I was looking at my whole life and I thought, ‘What else don’t I know about that a lot of suburban women might not know about?’”

“What are things that we just don’t put our toe in the water?” Her answer: politics.

Housley was at a good point in her life to take a dive into that new challenge. After splitting time between Minnesota and the many cities where her husband, Phil, played in his long National Hockey League career, Housley had come home full-time and started her own real-estate business. (Phil is now a coach and in the Hockey Hall of Fame.)

“I thought, ‘OK, it’s my time,’” she says. “It’s my time to stand up for our small-business owners, to really get into the mix of things.”

Housley was first elected to the Senate in 2012, and has since emerged as a leader in the Republican caucus (assistant majority leader) and as an important policy advocate for Minnesota’s population of seniors.

In an interview with CSG Midwest, Sen. Housley discussed her legislative passions and priorities, the state’s early response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the adjustments that she made as a legislator to serve her constituents during the crisis. Here are excerpts.

Q: When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, how did you adjust your legislative work to stay in touch with constituents? What did you learn from the experience?

A: Early on, I was the first one in our caucus to use Zoom. Nobody knew what it was, but I had used it a lot with my family because they’re all around the U.S. So within the first days of the pandemic, I formed a little group with different leaders in my district, including our police and fire chiefs, our hospital’s CEO, our Chamber of Commerce director, county commissioners, county attorneys, superintendent of schools. Also I have two parts of my district, the northern part and the southern part. So I called Zoom meetings, two a week, with mayors of some of the bigger cities, to talk about our preparedness. What was going on? What were they hearing? How were our hospitals doing? It was a way to continue to keep in touch with the leaders in the community.

Q: You then made the decision to open up some of those Zoom meetings to all of your constituents. Why?

A: The more knowledge people had, the calmer they would be. If they could tune in and see that the police chief is OK, the hospitals have beds and ventilators, that helped everyone. I even had our prison wardens on there. We have two prisons in my district, so I wanted people to know how things were going in the prisons, because people want to get the real facts straight from the horse’s mouth, not just some hearsay on Facebook or Twitter.

Q: You represent a suburban swing district in the Twin Cities area, and you serve in a partisan-split Legislature. How do you go about your legislative work in this kind of environment?

A: You know that every single vote you take, you’re going to have to go back to your district and be able to justify how you voted, because 50 percent of the people aren’t going to like it. There are a few of us in the Senate that have those kinds of (swing) districts, and we can move good, bipartisan bills. Overall, I think we have done a really good job in our Minnesota Legislature of keeping things toward the middle. I always feel Minnesota is a middle-left, middle-right state. We’re not one of these states that is so far to the right or so far to the left. And we’ve accomplished some really great things.

Q: Many of those legislative accomplishments for you have involved helping Minnesota’s senior population, including laws to prevent elder abuse and improve oversight at assisted-living facilities. Why is this policy area important to you?

A: My mom had Alzheimer’s, and being an advocate for my mom, I saw what it was like going through all of the transitions — from our home we grew up in, to assisted living, and, finally, to the nursing home. And I saw that there were so many seniors who had nobody to advocate for them at the state Capitol. You see all of these seniors in assisted-living facilities, and I really wanted to put some protections into law for them.

Q: What were some of those protections that you prioritized as a legislator?

A: We’ve got so many great caregivers that take care of our seniors in these facilities, but every once in a while, there’s a bad egg. Our assisted-living facilities weren’t licensed, so putting that framework in place was one of my biggest accomplishments — just really protecting our seniors in every which way I can. I got a bill passed last year that allowed for residents and their family members to put a camera in their loved one’s room so it can be an extra set of eyes on your parent while they’re in there. And it can also help catch bad people doing bad things.

So when it comes to the Family Care and Aging Committee, I did find my passion, and it is protecting our seniors, being a voice for them, and advocating for their needs because they have so many. They just have a soft spot in my heart. [Editor’s Note: Housley helped form this new committee in the Senate and is its chair.]

Q: What will be some of your legislative priorities going forward?

A: There are so many things, but No. 1 will always be our seniors. There are many more issues they need protection around that I want to work on, I also want to make sure our senior living facilities are still around because they’re going to take such a hit due to COVID-19. So we need to make sure we have the facilities for our seniors to live in, and then if they do live in them, we have to make sure we protect them.

Also, super important to me are our small businesses. Nothing drives small businesses crazier than big government coming down and telling them what to do. I want to help our small businesses fight for their freedoms. That’s the reason they went into their own business anyway; they wanted to be their own boss. To help them to do that, to help make it financially worthwhile for them because they’ve risked everything, is really important.