

Getting his release

Called a 'master legislator,' Bishop to end his two-decade obsession that saw the passage of more than 200 laws

By SARAH MCKENZIE

Rep. Dave Bishop, a 20-year veteran Republican lawmaker from Rochester, likens his affinity for public service to an addiction.

He must be addicted, he contends, or else why would he subject himself to the pain of losing arguments, listening to bad ideas, seeing bills fail, and sometimes offending friends when tempers flare during debate.

But Bishop, 73, has decided to kick the habit and retire from the House.

"I think that it is appropriate to announce that my 20-year term has been served and I can be released to the public," Bishop said May 9 on the House floor.

He has been an influential member of the body during his tenure, serving as chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, which is charged with fiscal oversight of legislation.

Bishop's legislative achievements include sponsorship of the sex offender community notification law, the living will, and the Minnesota Groundwater Protection Act, which has become a model for the nation.

The lawmaker has also taken heat from others in his party for his views on abortion — irking abortion opponents in 1995 when he proposed that men seeking vasectomies should face the same legal restrictions imposed on women seeking abortions.

In an emotional speech announcing his retirement, Bishop lauded the service of his colleagues and spoke out against cynicism.

"The altruism that the members of this body give to the benefit of Minnesota is so poorly appreciated," he said. "This is a wonderful institution. We honestly deal with each other. We deal with the issues honestly."

An outspoken critic of unicameral proposals, Bishop also urged members to keep the structure of the Legislature the same.

Following his speech, members from both sides of the aisle lined up to embrace and shake hands with Bishop.

House Majority Leader Tim Pawlenty (R-Eagan) said Bishop "really personifies the spirit of the institution in terms of the ability

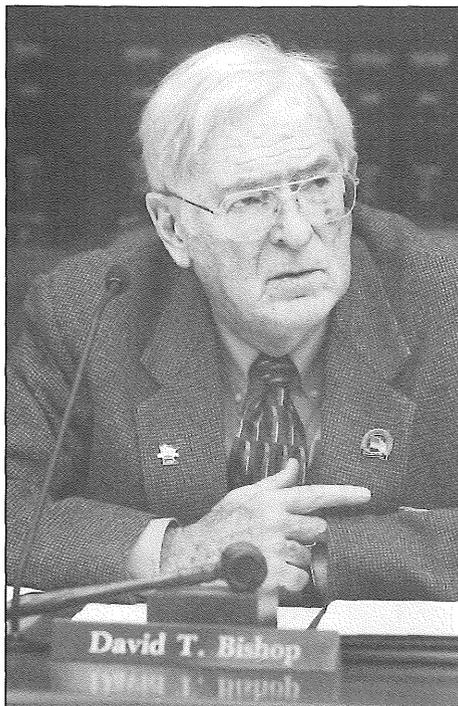


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Dave Bishop will retire from the House after serving 20 years, representing parts of Rochester.

to reach out to members in a bipartisan way."

In jest, he asked Bishop if he would support "community notification" upon his release to the public.

Rep. Loren Solberg (DFL-Bovey), the DFL lead on the ways and means committee, was elected the same year as Bishop. The two have developed a close friendship and were roommates at Harvard when they were working toward their master's degrees.

"This institution is going to miss Dave," Solberg said. "He is not afraid to take the politically tough road."

Bishop said his focus while in office has been to "pass good law."

"Partisanship should not be the primary goal and driver," he said.

Bishop points to his success in passing bills as evidence of his effectiveness as a negotiator. He said he has pushed through more than 200, last time he counted.

In part, he attributes the achievement to spending a lot of time making sure his ideas will have traction in the Senate and being asked to serve on a number of conference committees.

From the beginning of his time in the House, Bishop said he has approached lawmaking with an eye toward improving bills regardless of partisan support. When confronted with a good idea presented in bad form, Bishop said he has worked to fix the bill by offering amendments.

Bishop uses a chess board analogy when describing the legislative process.

The board has three layers — one each for the governor, Senate, and the House, he says. On the Senate and House layers, there are black and white pieces for the majority and minority. The governor's pieces represent different proposals.

Each move, Bishop explained, affects the pieces on every level. Effective legislators need to understand the interconnectedness, he said.

Rep. Fran Bradley (R-Rochester) called Bishop a "master legislator."

"He applies the science and art of lawmaking with extraordinary skill," Bradley said. "But Dave Bishop will also be remembered for his often unpredictable character. Sometimes jovial, sometimes serious, sometimes charming, sometimes outrageous, but always a character."

Bishop, who retired from his law practice at 53, said his work as an attorney helped shape his approach to legislating.

As a lawyer he strove to settle cases, gaining the negotiation skills he is known for in the House.

"The skills of listening and persuasion are so important," Bishop said.

Rep. Dan McElroy (R-Burnsville), who sits next to Bishop on the House floor, called the legislator a "master deal maker."

"He's relentless, very smart, and focused," McElroy said. "He's a cantankerous but lovable curmudgeon." 

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Dave Bishop
Republican
District 30B—Rochester
Terms: 10

Career notes: Since being elected in 1982, Bishop has passed more than 200 bills, including the 1996 sex offender community notification law. Bishop has also served as chair of the House Ways and Means Committee.