

1991 House Leadership Series . . .

Dempsey hopes to avoid 'arm-twisting'

Rep. Terry Dempsey (IR-New Ulm) laughs off any comparison between being a foster parent and now being the House Independent-Republican Caucus leader.

But it's easy to argue there are similarities between overseeing a home filled with headstrong children and presiding over a caucus of headstrong representatives.

Dempsey's house has been home to 15 foster children between 1968 and 1982. Now he has the sometimes difficult task of convincing the 53 Independent-Republicans in the House to toe the party line.

"I'm not really an arm-twister," says Dempsey. "I don't like to have my arm twisted, and I don't like to do unto others something I don't want them to do to me."

Instead, Dempsey, a partner in the New Ulm law firm of Somsen, Dempsey and Schade, hopes the simple power of rational persuasion will do the job.

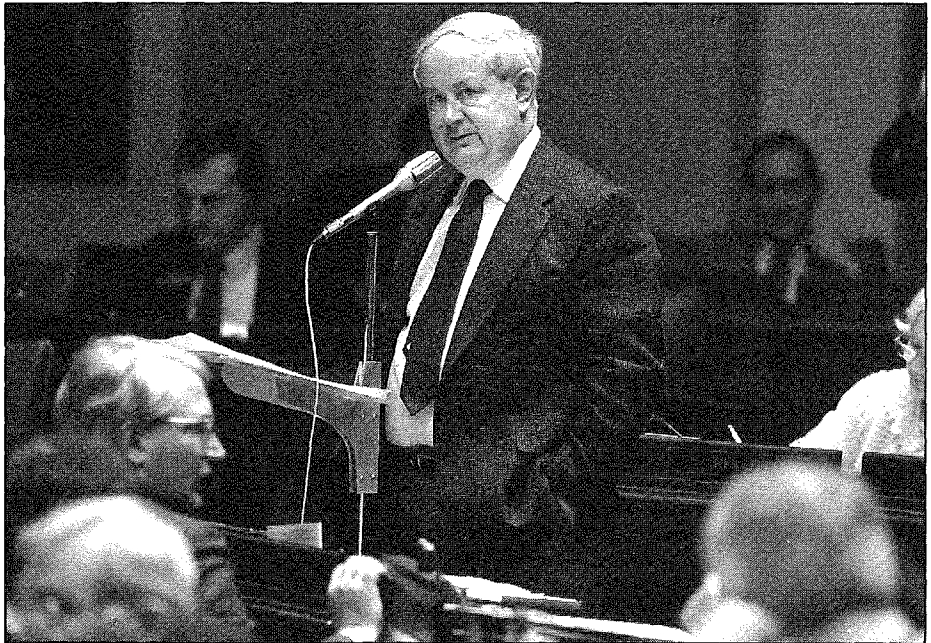
"I'm hopeful that most of the people in this caucus are rational, practical people and I think my job is more to convince them a certain position or vote is the proper thing to do — the proper thing as political individuals and the proper thing to do as Republicans in the state of Minnesota," he says. "I hope reason and logic will prevail over coercion and threats."

It's a style that appears to be working. Dempsey is 1-0 in big legislative battles in the opening weeks of his term as minority leader, helping shepherd Gov. Arne Carlson's budget-reduction bill through the DFL-controlled House.

Dempsey, now in his seventh term, is quick to point out that he had a lot of help in ushering the bill through the process. He gives a lot of credit to his caucus leadership team.

But he also points out that having a governor of the same party makes leading the minority caucus a much easier task. The governor gives a forceful voice to issues that are important to party members, and can provide staff and other resources to help implement that agenda, he says.

And then, there's also the power of



Minority Leader Terry Dempsey

the governor's veto.

"Having Gov. Carlson in office . . . makes this job a lot more palatable," Dempsey says. "When you're in the absolute minority, with no executive branch support, you're really at a loss to have a lot of clout in the process."

"You still don't have enough votes to pass things, you still lose legislative battles, but at least you know there's that backup system in the governor's office. It gives you veto power and it gives you all of the (state agency) commissioners and everybody else arguing for your side of the case."

Dempsey expects wrangling over the expected \$1.2 billion deficit in the next biennium to dominate the 1991 Session. But he says it's still possible for other issues — cleaning up the environment and expanding health care insurance — to rise to the top of the legislative agenda.

More likely, however, Dempsey says legislators may have to be satisfied with "planting the seeds" to correct those problems in the future when more money is available.

"I don't think it will be a failure not solving a problem in its entirety the first year of this biennium," he says. "If we can define the problem, structure a solution, and begin the process to build that

structure, we will have accomplished something."

And it's getting the job done — partly through tact, and partly through the power of his position — that appeals to Dempsey in serving as minority leader.

"There's that feeling that you're just a little bit more than just one vote out of 201 at the Legislature," he says. "The sphere of influence is just a little greater. And that's why we're here — to influence decisions and mold outcomes."

—Dave Price

Feb. 6, 1862

On this day, Redwood County was established and named for the red cedars and willows in the area.