

Rep. Jim Farrell . . .

Legislator exits speaking of family, friends, mentors

By Sandy Donovan



Rep. Jim Farrell (DFL-St. Paul) says eight years in the Legislature have not dimmed his East Side sensibilities.

"But that's something my mother has always worried about," he said. "She worried when I went to college, she worried when I went to law school, and she worried when I came here that I'd stop going to church every week."

He hasn't disappointed her, but he says his Irish Catholic mother is happy that her son is stepping down as a legislator this year.

"She's excited that I won't have to vote on any more abortion questions," he said. Farrell's pro-choice votes have been less than popular in his mother's neighborhood.

But while she's pleased to see him leaving the Capitol, his mother was partially responsible for his decision to first run for the House, in 1990, at age 30.

After his father died in 1989, Farrell said his mother had an incredibly difficult time securing both health insurance and her late husband's railroad pension.

Farrell came to the House hoping to make changes that would spare other families such difficult situations, and he has concentrated on advocating for working people during his four terms.

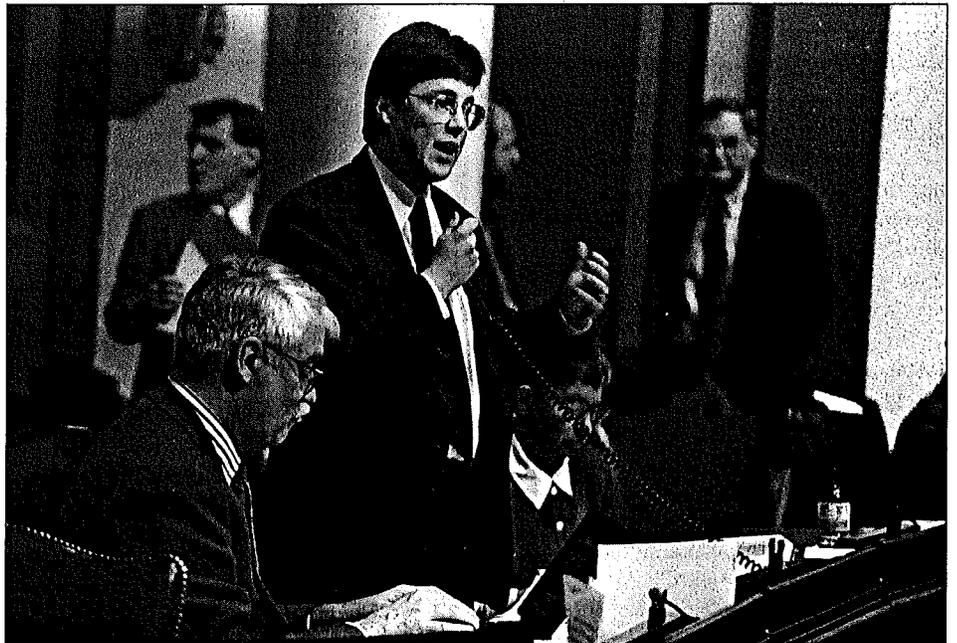
He has sponsored bills aimed at improving the state's child-protection system, at reducing violence in schools, and at increasing victims' rights.

"I am who I am," he said. "I'm a third generation East Sider."

He's also a juvenile prosecutor for Hennepin County and a former assistant public defender for Ramsey County — and the only legislator to have tried a felony trial before a jury as both a prosecutor and a public defender.

"I represent hardworking folks who, if they came down here [to the Capitol], would be angered by the lack of backbone that's shown," he said.

Backbones, or lack thereof, serve as a yard-



Rep. Jim Farrell will leave the House after four terms to run for the office of Ramsey County attorney.

stick for Farrell in assessing his colleagues.

"The saddest thing is to watch people get their arm twisted, and to see them vote against something they passionately believe in," he said.

He's quick to point out the strong characters of the many legislators he counts as mentors and friends.

"[Rep.] Mary Murphy has been a good mentor," he said. "She taught me the importance of trusting people. And if you want real change, you've got to build consensus and trust."

Along with Murphy (DFL-Hermantown), Farrell lists Reps. Dave Bishop (R-Rochester), Bernie Lieder (DFL-Crookston), and Thomas Pugh (DFL-South St. Paul) as mentors.

"And there are members that I don't think I've ever voted with but that I respect because I've watched them stand up and say what they think," Farrell said.

He says he's built friendships across both party and regional lines during his time in the House.

"But the best thing about being here has been getting to know Steve Trimble," he said. "For the last two years he's played Santa Claus at Christmas at our house, and although my two daughters don't know it's him, they've really developed a bond."

Trimble (DFL-St. Paul) represents a House district bordering Farrell's.

Farrell says he'll miss his colleagues when he leaves the House but he won't miss the lack of control over his schedule.

"Sadly, I know there are some people here that I probably won't see again," he said. "But I have a six-year-old daughter in dance who I love to watch, and I know I'll have fun just watching my four-year-old twisting dad around her little finger."

Still, it's unlikely that Farrell's schedule will measurably lighten when the 1998 Legislative Session ends. He's running for Ramsey County attorney this year, seeking the DFL endorsement in May. He has said that he will abide by the party's endorsement. 

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