

Rep. LeRoy Koppendrayer departs . . .

Lawmaker called thinker, risk taker, team player

By Nick Healy



Rep. LeRoy Koppendrayer (R-Princeton), a fourth-term lawmaker noted for his leadership on education issues, was appointed to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) last month by Gov. Arne Carlson.

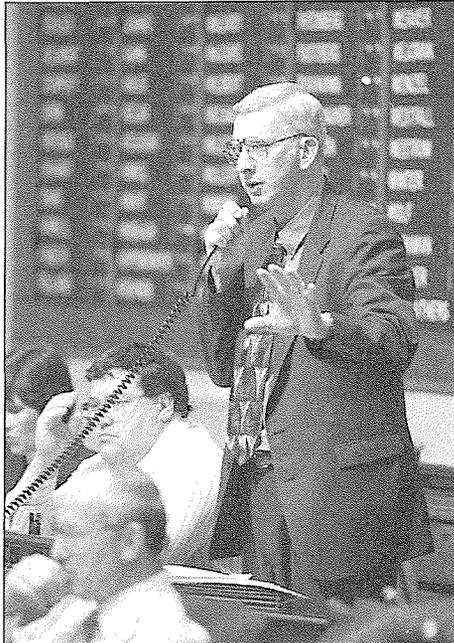
Koppendrayer was an assistant minority leader in the House, and he was the lead Republican on the K-12 Finance Division of the House Education Committee. His resignation was effective Dec. 8, 1997, and he officially assumed his new post Jan. 5.

The move to the PUC is just the latest venture on Koppendrayer's long and widely varied resume.

"If you're looking for new opportunities in life, exciting things can happen," Koppendrayer said.

And Koppendrayer certainly has seen some exciting things in his life. Before coming to the House, he worked as a truck driver in an Iron Range mine, as a manager for Fingerhut Corp., and as an international agricultural consultant who assisted dairy farmers in South America, Africa, and other places around the globe.

As a legislator, Koppendrayer was a straight-talker who made a name for himself as a leader in efforts to change the public education system in Minnesota. He carried controversial school voucher legislation in recent years and backed the successful effort to increase the tax deduction for educational expenses and to provide low- to moderate-income families with a tax credit for education expenses.



Rep. LeRoy Koppendrayer, a seven-year legislator noted for his work on K12 education policy, was selected by Gov. Arne Carlson to fill a vacancy on the Public Utilities Commission.

Now Koppendrayer lists his work on education issues as his most significant contribution as a legislator.

"Accountability and choice will enhance education," Koppendrayer said. "We succeeded in getting those issues raised in public awareness. Now I think the public is demanding accountability, and that issue is not going to go away."

House Minority Leader Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon) expressed mixed emotions over

Koppendrayer's departure.

"I'm happy for LeRoy, and I think this will be a good fit for him," Sviggum said. "Obviously, it's a loss for our caucus and the entire Legislature. He was a real thinker and one who was not afraid to take on some tough issues."

Sviggum is losing more than one of his leaders in the caucus. He is also losing a confidant and roommate. For the past two years, Koppendrayer and Sviggum have shared quarters when in St. Paul for legislative business.

"He will be missed," Sviggum said. "He was a real team player, and he was willing to take a risk and to step out of that comfort zone. Leaders have to be able to do that."

Koppendrayer began serving as a member of the House Regulated Industries and Energy Committee in 1997, and he said it was that experience that whetted his appetite for the kind of work he will be doing on the PUC.

Koppendrayer, who will serve a six-year term on the commission, said he looks forward to dealing with "hot issues" such as the deregulation of electrical utilities and the rapid growth of telecommunications.

"I won't be bored. That's for sure," he said.

And Koppendrayer said he is confident other legislators will step up to fill the role he played with his House caucus.

"As soon as you think you're indispensable, look in the mirror and you're looking at your only friend," Koppendrayer said. 

Committee deadlines

Each year, the House and Senate set deadlines by which most bills must be heard in a committee and forwarded through the process.

By the first committee deadline, **Friday, Feb. 13**, all bills must be passed out of all policy committees in their house of origin to receive further consideration this session. If a House bill has not been approved by a House policy committee by the deadline, but its Senate companion has been approved by a Senate policy

committee, the bill has met the committee deadline.

By the second committee deadline, **Friday, Feb. 20**, all bills other than those containing appropriations, must be passed out of all policy committees in both the House and the Senate. The deadline does not apply to the finance divisions of the committees or the House Rules and Legislative Administration Committee, the House Taxes Committee, and the House Ways and Means Committee.

By the third committee deadline, **Friday, Feb. 27**, all appropriations bills must clear their policy and finance committees and move to either the Taxes Committee or the Ways and Means Committee.

Of course, there are exceptions to the deadlines. Any lawmaker may try to convince the Rules and Legislative Administration Committee, which includes leaders from both party caucuses, to hear a bill after the deadlines.