

New members . . .

'Well done is better than well said,' says Kraus

Coming or going, Rep. Ron Kraus gets a helpful reminder from one of America's founding fathers.



Rep. Ron Kraus

A tiny piece of paper taped just below his office light switch bears a simple but meaningful quote from Ben Franklin: "Well done is better than well said."

And that, says Kraus (IR-Albert Lea), is how he intends to represent his constituents in District 27A in southern Minnesota.

He aims to serve with an open ear and a determination to act on the will of the people, and to be "a real watchdog" over the taxes they pay and how that money is spent.

And he is looking to help education thrive and to bolster employment in the state.

"If government had \$3 to spend, I'd spend the first dollar on education, I'd spend another dollar to create real, meaningful jobs and I'd give the third dollar back to the taxpayers because they're better at spending it than we are," Kraus said.

The owner of five convenience stores and six Dairy Queen restaurants in southern Minnesota and northern Iowa, Kraus was elected in 1994 to fill the seat left open by former Rep. Bob Haukoos (IR-Albert Lea), who retired after eight terms in the House.

Before making his first run for state office, Kraus served as a member of the Albert Lea Planning Commission and the Community Foundation Board, and he was chairman of the board for the Freeborn County Chamber of Commerce. He and his wife, Kathy, have two sons: John, 11; and Chad, 13.

Business and politics have long been among Kraus' passions, and he sees some clear simi-

larities between the two.

"Retail is not a business of brick and mortar," Kraus said. "Retail is a business of relationships, and politics is a lot like that. It's listening and doing your best to work with people. In one case, you've got customers; in the other, you've got constituents."

Communication is the key to Kraus' plans to serve constituents in the 16 communities in his district. He writes a weekly column for three newspapers to let people know where he stands, does a weekly radio show, and uses a toll-free phone line and frequent town hall meetings to get input straight from the people.

"I encourage people's participation. It's really hard to represent somebody who is silent," Kraus said. "I want them to let me know what they're thinking."

Still, the Waltham native doesn't expect to have every constituent agree with him on every vote. "I think the biggest compliment for one in public office is when people say, 'I don't always agree with you, but I always trust you,'" he said.

The similarity between politics and business seems especially clear this year, Kraus said. With no room for more government or more taxes, he believes the state, like many businesses, must find a way to do more with less. "The challenge of government is to make things work without raising prices," he said.

One thing Kraus said the state must do is to provide people the chance to get a quality education.

"A dollar well spent on education is more than a dollar saved later," he said. "Education will allow a person to find meaningful employment, and a person with a good job doesn't need much government."

Realizing the importance of education, Kraus said, will help reduce the need for

costly government services to help people who can't afford essentials including food, housing, transportation, and health care.

Supporting business and fostering job growth also is crucial to reducing the burden on government, Kraus added.

He would like nothing more than to see the Legislature hold a session exclusively to consider matters relating to job creation. That way, lawmakers could focus on what they can do to help businesses succeed and, in the process, create good jobs for Minnesotans, Kraus said.

"Government's role is to create an atmosphere for others to find solutions," he said. "Government's role is never to be the solution to a problem."

During his first year in a place where "we hold meetings about meetings," Kraus plans to mind Ben Franklin's advice and push for results.

"I'm hoping that we really do get a lot accomplished," Kraus said. "I think the voters are expecting their money's worth now more than ever."

— Nick Healy

District 27A

Population: 33,060

Distribution: 55.38 percent urban, 44.62 percent rural

County: Freeborn

Largest city: Albert Lea

Location: south central Minnesota

Unemployment rate: 8.54 percent

Residents living below poverty level: 10.25 percent

1992 presidential election results:

Bush/Quayle 28.31 percent

Clinton/Gore 43.17 percent

Perot/Stockdale 27.14 percent

Other: 1.38 percent