

House member returns home to create 'meaningful jobs'

By Matt Wetzel

After the regular 1998 Legislative Session, Rep. Ron Kraus (R-Albert Lea) stopped to assess things.

When he ran in 1994, Kraus said he would stay in office only for two or three terms, and last week he paused to consider running for a third term. He decided the answer is no.

"My business has grown and with the help of my family and friends I came to the decision," he said. The decision was reached over several days following the end of the session.

Kraus, 41, owns Kraus Foods, which operates Dairy Queen restaurants and convenience stores in Iowa and Minnesota. He said that on occasion, he'll even take his turn at dishing up the soft-serve.

"My family is important to me and I want to spend more time with them and my business," Kraus said. "Although it feels really good to help people by serving them in the Legislature, there is no better feeling than the one I get creating real, meaningful jobs here at home. That's where I'm going to focus my attention."

Successful legislation Kraus carried includes a law that requires school superintendent candidates to tell the hiring school board if they had ever been bought out of a previous job contract. He also was able to get \$800,000 for the Blazing Star Trail, \$250,000 for Albert Lea schools to develop a unique kindergarten and first-grade pilot program, and a \$250,000 "Mighty Ducks" grant for a second ice sheet in Albert Lea, Minn.

Kraus served on several House committees — Education, Taxes, Agriculture, and Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs — during his legislative career.

He said his favorite was the Taxes Committee, which was particularly busy this past ses-

sion, having to deal with a projected \$1.9 billion surplus in state coffers.

"In my two years [on that committee], I was proud of the way we did some reductions in commercial and industrial [property] tax rates," Kraus said. "I think the [property tax] rebates were a good idea. I would like to have gone deeper. When you compromise with the committee as a whole, I think both sides achieve some good things."

The 1998 omnibus tax bill, which Gov. Arne Carlson has indicated he will sign, includes \$500 million in property tax rebates and cuts in commercial and industrial tax rates. Kraus and other Republicans fought for deeper cuts.

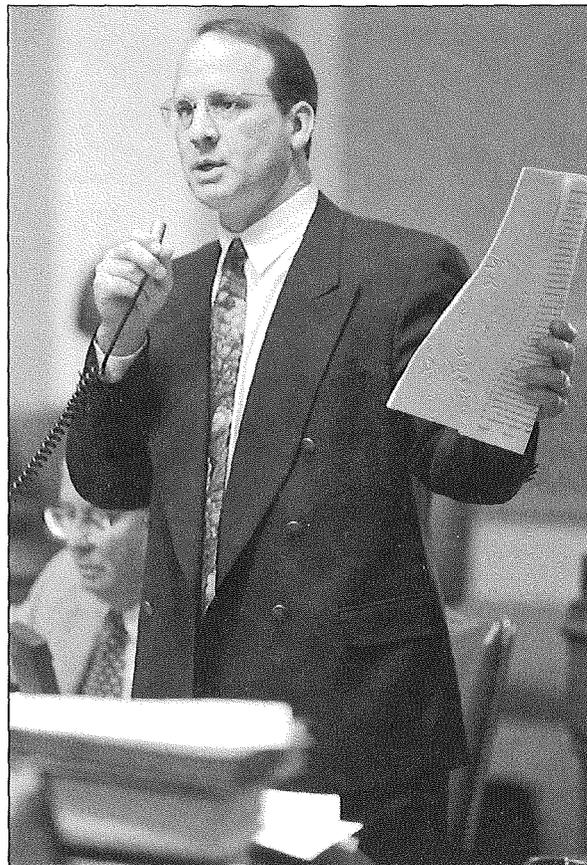
Kraus said he is leaving without regrets, despite the fact that he was in the minority caucus throughout his time in office.

"It's a wonderful opportunity to serve people. I would encourage anybody to serve this way. I don't leave with any bad feelings," he said.

Kraus said he will miss his fellow legislators, and after he made his announcement early on April 16, he got "pages of responses from . . . colleagues on both sides of the aisle."

"I leave feeling I have good friends on both sides of the aisle," he said.

Out of gratitude to his constituents, Kraus and his wife, Kathy, have pledged \$5,000 to the Youth in Government Program at the YMCA in Albert Lea.



Rep. Ron Kraus is leaving the House after two terms.

"We want young people to know that public service is something that is good," Kraus said.

One tradition Kraus is determined to keep alive is the annual Dilly Bar Day in the Legislature. As an owner of Dairy Queen franchises, he was able to supply his colleagues with the popular treat on the designated day — and he did it for four years.

Next year, he said, he'll encourage his successor to adhere to the same tradition.

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