

Kubly vows to shepherd property tax, campaign reform

It has been said that the best way to avoid an argument is to stay away from the topics of politics or religion. For Rep. Gary Kubly (DFL-Granite Falls), that could be tough:



Rep. Gary Kubly

The first-term legislator is also an ordained Lutheran minister.

"I asked the congregational president if he thought the congregation would approve of its pastor running for office, and he asked me with which party," Kubly said, chuckling. "I told him — and he said he thought it would be all right."

In fact, Kubly said, his congregations in rural southwest Minnesota reacted favorably when he announced his candidacy for the District 15B seat. What's more, their support transcended partisan politics, he said, with many parishioners donating time and money to his campaign.

The first-term representative is a product of rural life. He grew up on an Iowa farm near the Minnesota border, just south of Albert Lea, Minn., where he learned firsthand about the rigors that come with earning a living from the land. And although Kubly came to the Twin Cities in 1970 to go to the seminary, he has spent his professional life serving a rural flock — precisely what he hopes to accomplish as a legislator, particularly with regard to property tax reform.

The conventional wisdom, Kubly said, is that rural Minnesotans will have to shoulder a larger share of the property tax burden. He doesn't quite see it that way. The first-term legislator, though, enters the House as a

strong advocate for his district.

"Over my dead body," he said with an air of quiet determination. "Nobody in my district would support that . . . [property tax reform is] not metropolitan versus rural; it's what's fair for everybody."

Kubly's predecessor, former Rep. Roger Cooper, (DFL-Bird Island) held the seat for five terms and was instrumental in passing a number of programs that benefited Greater Minnesota constituents, including MinnesotaCare, tax breaks for ethanol plants, and better training for rural health care workers. Kubly, who has worked closely with farmers over the years, campaigned — and won — as a man who would pick up where Cooper left off.

Election to the Minnesota House of Representatives is not Kubly's first foray into the political realm. He challenged incumbent state Sen. Dean Johnson (R-Willmar) for the District 15 seat in 1992, coming within a few percentage points of beating the Senate minority leader. Indeed, in the 15B area, Kubly actually finished ahead of Johnson. Yet Kubly won his House seat in 1996 by an even narrower margin, finishing just 1.3 percent — a mere 202 votes — ahead of his Republican challenger.

The contest, Kubly said, turned ugly as the campaign drew to a close. In the days leading up to the election, the minister found himself on the business end of a series of mass mailings that allowed him no time to respond. Kubly also became the subject of a series of negative advertisements that aired well beyond the Minnesota border.

"I'm sure people in Wisconsin were wondering what was going on when they heard

political ads for this race in rural Minnesota," he said.

As a result of the negative campaign, Kubly has come to believe campaign laws need to be changed to prevent similar occurrences. A law could be written, he said, to prohibit a candidate from running any new advertisements 10 days before the election to ensure that the person targeted would have adequate time to respond.

"I still believe in free speech," Kubly said, but something needs to be done.

Although his faith serves as the foundation for his political ideology, Kubly said, a belief in "a beneficent Creator — God and what has been done for us" — shouldn't preclude the debate surrounding any issue. It's vital, he explained, that legislators allow one another the latitude to disagree, regardless of their religious views.

"I'm not sure there is a 'Christian' position," Kubly said. "It bothers me when someone says, 'This is the Christian position.' I don't think that there is a Christian position on most things, anyway. There are just Christians who hold views."

—F.J. Gallagher

District 15B

1996 population: 32,513
Largest city: Granite Falls
Counties: Chippewa, Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, Renville, Yellow Medicine
Location: south central Minnesota
Top concern: "I think rural parts of the state need some representation when it comes to bonding."

—Rep. Gary Kubly



Richard Laurion, *right*, used sign language to interpret comments and questions from members of the House Education Committee for Bruce Hodek, *middle*, assistant director of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division, Department of Human Services Feb. 18. Hodek testified in support of a bill that calls for American Sign Language to be given equal status with other linguistic systems in the state's schools. Rep. Ruth Johnson, *left*, is sponsoring the bill.