

Take two

Kubly will make another run for the Senate, this time in an open seat, after serving in the House for six years

By LISA HILTON

Thinking it would be nice to only have to run for re-election every four years rather than every two, and facing an open Senate seat in a newly redrawn legislative district, Rep. Gary Kubly (DFL-Granite Falls) says this is a good time to try to switch chambers.

An ordained Lutheran minister, Kubly has represented the people of District 15B since 1996. Although he was active in DFL precinct caucuses before that time and was narrowly defeated by Sen. Dean Johnson (DFL-Willmar) for a Senate seat in 1992, Kubly said he hadn't considered running for a House seat until his predecessor called and asked him to consider the opportunity.

The problem was that former Rep. Roger Cooper (DFL-Bird Island) called him in 1996 on Tuesday of the Holy Week preceding Easter, a time when the minister had quite enough to do already.

"I told him it wasn't a really good time for me," he said.

After receiving numerous other calls from people in the district, he announced his candidacy a few weeks later.

"I didn't know that many people knew I was a Democrat," he said.

The empty Senate seat in newly created District 20 will include 55 percent of his former constituents, so Kubly isn't sure how tough the race will be. So far, three Republicans have announced their intention to run for the seat.

Growing up on an Iowa farm near the Minnesota border just south of Albert Lea, Kubly brought his rural roots with him to the Legislature, and he has been a strong advocate of rural issues while in the House. He has served on the various House agriculture committees in each of his three terms.

That focus won't change if he is successful in moving to the Senate, Kubly says.

"I'll keep rural issues on the forefront," he said.

Kubly said the state needs to keep a rural voice in the Legislature, especially after redistricting tilted the balance of representation even further toward the Twin Cities metropolitan area. "Rural areas have lost a little

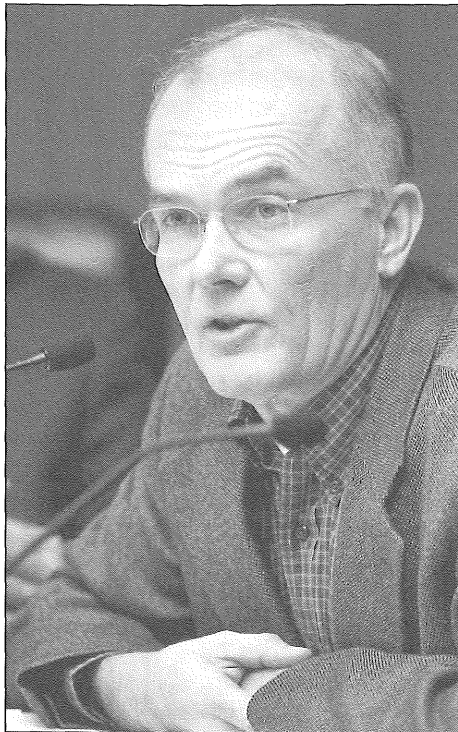


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

Rep. Gary Kubly is leaving the House after this term to pursue a seat in the Minnesota Senate.

ground," he said.

Part of his work for small Minnesota communities involved advocating for state assistance during natural disasters, such as the tornado that leveled part of St. Peter on March 29, 1998 and the July 25, 2000 twister in Yellow Medicine and Chippewa counties.

He said assistance to fill the gap between what private insurance companies will cover and what is left needs to be covered by the state.

The state also needs to address wastewater problems in rural Minnesota, Kubly said.

Wastewater treatment programs haven't been adequately funded, resulting in many communities being forced to pump sewage into ditches every time it rains, he said.

Although it isn't the most interesting topic, the problem has created a huge public health hazard and needs to be taken care of, he said.

Along with his rural roots, Kubly's role as a

minister affects his service as a legislator. For him, the two jobs are related.

"Politics is your faith in action, at least that's how I see it," he said.

Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar) was elected at the same time as Kubly and has shared an apartment with him during the session for six years.

"Being a Lutheran minister, he brings a unique view of the process to the Legislature," Juhnke said. "I always think of him as the calm of the storm. Nothing gets him too excited," he said. But on the occasions when Kubly does get fired up, "then you better listen to him because he's probably right."


Rep. Tim Finseth (R-Angus) agreed.

"He's the kind of person I like to work with," said Finseth, chair of the House Agriculture Policy Committee. "He didn't speak on every issue, but when he did, he had something important to say."

Serving in the Legislature doesn't take Kubly far from his family, since his three adult children live in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, and his wife, Patricia, has also been in town helping care for their 3-month-old granddaughter.

Kubly said he expects the Senate to be similar to the House but noted that the Senate is somewhat less contentious, and seems to get its work done faster.

"Maybe that's because there are half as many people and half as many opinions," he said.

Kubly's advice to his replacement is short and simple: "Listen to the people," he said. Representatives have to make decisions that affect the entire state, he said, but "first and foremost you are called to be their representative." 

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Gary Kubly
DFL

District 15B — Granite Falls

Terms: 3

Career notes: Having served on several committees, including those governing agriculture and rural development, Kubly has worked to equalize the differences between urban and rural areas. He advocated for state assistance to St. Peter in 1998 and Yellow Medicine and Chippewa counties in 2000 after those areas suffered damage from tornadoes. He also helped secure disaster aid after flooding in Granite Falls.