

New members . . .

Paulsen applies market principles to government

Erik Paulsen was working as a marketing analyst for a direct mail company when the lure of politics became irresistible. He quit



Rep. Erik Paulsen

his job in 1989 to become an intern in the St. Paul office of former U.S. Sen. Rudy Boschwitz.

The Independent-Republican from Eden Prairie later put to use his mathematical studies at St. Olaf College in assisting U.S. Rep. Jim Ramstad on the Small Business Committee in Washington, D.C. Paulsen returned to Minnesota in May 1992 to become district director of the congressman's Bloomington office.

When former Rep. Sidney Pauly announced her retirement last year, Paulsen saw a "great opportunity to have an impact on local issues — issues that would affect my family and the area I grew up in."

He ran a shoe leather campaign. "I knocked on 12,364 doors, so I'm glad that's over," he admits. Paulsen says he "out-hustled" a primary challenger and then won a House seat last November at the tender age of 29. (He's not the youngest House member, however. Rep. Tim Commers, another St. Olaf alum-nus, is 28.)

Paulsen thought at first that his "youth might be a liability," but he said he realized "more and more that it was an asset in the campaign." He said that constituents appreciated his visits and were "excited" to see him working hard to spread his message.

Paulsen's legislative agenda will focus on improving the state's business climate, a lesson he literally learned at his grandfather's knee.

"When I was growing up my grandfather

owned a small manufacturing company in Plymouth and he always talked about workers' compensation costs and other impediments to doing business in Minnesota," Paulsen recalled.

Every year, South Dakota officials would visit Paulsen's grandfather to urge him to "move or expand" his business to the "Coyote State." Serving on the House Labor-Management Relations Committee will give Paulsen a say on the direction of workers' compensation reform legislation.

Concerning welfare reform, Paulsen said he would like to adapt "private marketplace principles" to public assistance programs. He would like to offer some form of bonuses for caseworkers "who help welfare recipients get jobs." He thinks that such incentives will motivate caseworkers to get their clients off the welfare rolls.

"I think competition and accountability are real powerful incentives," he said.

And like many of his Independent-Republican colleagues, Paulsen said many of his constituents are burdened by high property taxes.

"There's a myth" that people can pay high taxes just because they live in a "high property tax value area," said Paulsen, who represents parts of Eden Prairie and Edina. He added that he wants to "link education funding reform with tax reform."

To hold the line on taxes, Paulsen said he would like to require a "super majority" — or 60 percent vote — before any tax increase measure in the Legislature could be adopted. And he would also like to see the "super majority" proposal adopted as a constitutional amendment so legislators couldn't change it from year to year. (Currently, all that is needed in the House to approve a tax

bill is 68 votes; half of the 134-member House is 67).

Away from the Legislature and politics, Paulsen's "number one thing" is spending time at home with his wife and young daughter. He also enjoys cross-country skiing, hiking, camping, and late night broomball games with friends from St. Olaf.

The legislative session, so far, is going too slowly for Paulsen's taste. Most committee meetings are consumed with overviews of state departments, agencies, and boards, so he's waiting for the real action to start. He contrasts the slow pace at the Legislature with the new Congress, where lawmakers bolt out of the starting blocks "from day one."

Paulsen knows that the pace will pick up, and he's encouraged by the commitment to "real change" he finds, especially among the first-term representatives — "both the Republicans and the Democrats."

Paulsen says he sees "some real opportunities in the Legislature this year to get some things done. That's what people really want."

— Mordecai Spektor

District 42B

Population: 32,285
Distribution: 100 percent urban
County: Hennepin
Largest city: Edina
Location: southwestern Metro
Unemployment rate: 3.58 percent
Residents living below poverty level: 3.60 percent
1992 presidential election results:
 Bush/Quayle 43.51 percent
 Clinton/Gore 32.78 percent
 Perot/Stockdale 22.98 percent
 Other: 0.73 percent

Bribery doesn't always involve money. An apple will suffice. Just ask Rep. Ted Winter (DFL-Fulda).

Before presenting a local bill for southwestern Minnesota to the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs Committee Feb. 14, Winter gave Chair Dee Long (DFL-Mpls) an apple.

After the committee recommended his bill to pass, Long thanked Winter for the apple (size, type, and freshness unknown).

Knowledge of the apple sent some members of the committee into a mock tizzy, outwardly whining: "How come she got an apple?" Cries of



bribery rang through the committee room as well as calls for a full investigation into the scandal.

"An apple a day makes the bills pass right away," Winter joked as he rushed out the door.

Should legislators have to pass a physical fitness test before they propose a new or proposed trail system?

Rep. Virgil Johnson (IR-Caledonia) presented

a bill before the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee Feb. 15 to extend the Blufflands Trail System to include the towns of Minnesota City, Rollingstone, Altura, Lewiston, Utica, St. Charles, and Elba in southeastern Minnesota.

As the measure sailed through the committee, Rep. Steve Trimble (DFL-St. Paul) offered his conditional support to the bill's sponsor: "I'll vote for it if Rep. Johnson promises to walk from Minnesota City to Elba."

"That's asking a lot from a fat old man, but I'll try," Johnson replied.