

Seizing an unexpected opportunity

Paulsen leaving state House to run for the U.S. House

By BRIAN HOGENSON

When U.S. Rep. Jim Ramstad (R-Minn.) announced he would not seek reelection in 2008, leaving the race to represent Minnesota's third congressional district wide open for the first time in nearly two decades, Rep. Erik Paulsen (R-Eden Prairie) was not chomping at the bit to run for the seat.

"I had no interest at all the first couple of days," said Paulsen, a former Ramstad aide. "But the more people talked to me, I realized it was an opportunity I should not pass up."

Confident that he would do a good job, Paulsen said that serving in the U.S. House would be an "exciting opportunity to represent my district."

Something he hopes take with him to Washington D.C. is an ability to build relationships with members of the opposing party.

During his four years as House majority leader, Paulsen said it was important to get his caucus moving in the same direction, but also found it important to build relationships across the aisle.

That is one of the most important things he

offers as advice to his successor.

"Be true to your constituents always. Remember that they were the ones that elected you," Paulsen said. "Be a good listener to all points of view and build relationships with your colleagues." He credits his ability to get legislation passed while in the minority to having good ideas and because of the relationships he has forged by reaching across the aisle.

Paulsen adds that it is also important to maintain balance and stay rooted with your family in order to keep everything in perspective.

According to Paulsen, the people of Minnesota don't want legislators to compromise their principles, but they do want them to be pragmatic and solution-oriented to facilitate getting things done.

Reflecting on his 14 years in the House, Paulsen says that in addition to keeping up with all the new faces, a change he has noticed is the expanding scope and vision of legislation. "When I got here it was about making Minnesota competitive with our neighboring states. Now it has shifted to global competition.

"Making Minnesota competitive in a global economy is an important issue for me. I've tried to have a long-term and international vision."

Paulsen said that, unfortunately, with two-year election cycles, members tend to look for short-term solutions and "govern by sound bites."

Two of the international initiatives Paulsen is proud of are his work in bringing an India Center to the University of Minnesota and an initiative to introduce the Mandarin Chinese language to Minnesota students.

Other legislative accomplishments that Paulsen looks to fondly are legislation to give organ donors an income tax exemption to cover the expenses that go along with their life-saving act and bringing more fairness to suburban school funding.

The latter earned him an award as a "Friend of Public Education," something Paulsen said typically would not be associated with being a Republican.

One thing that Paulsen has not been able to completely wind through the legislative process is bringing ballot referendums and initiatives to Minnesota. Paulsen introduced the legislation during his first term and has carried the legislation ever since. It has passed the House several times but never made it any further.

Paulsen hopes it will someday come to fruition, as it will give "voters more of a say in the democratic process." 

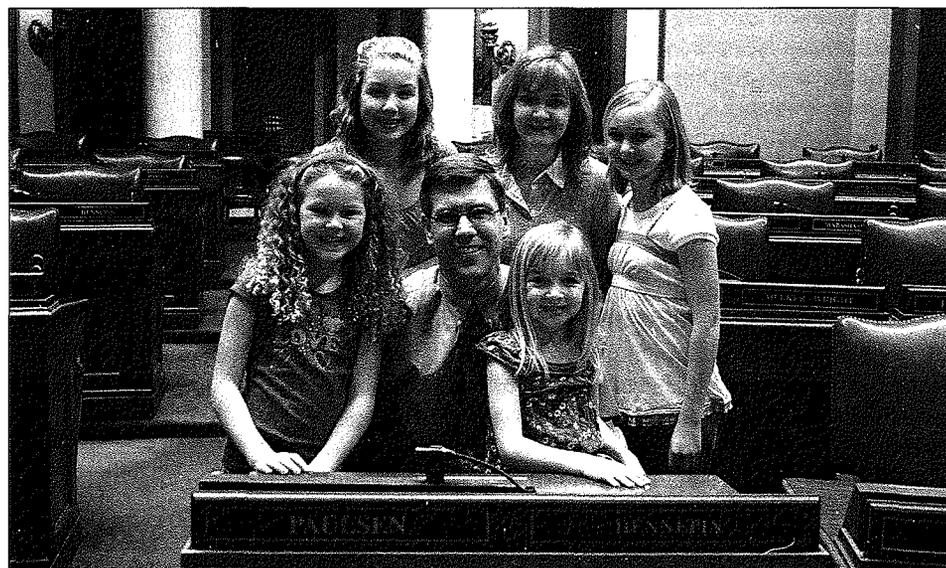


PHOTO BY SARAH STACKE

Surrounded by his wife and children, Rep. Erik Paulsen is running to represent the 3rd congressional district.

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Erik Paulsen
Republican
District 42B – Eden Prairie
Terms: 7 (elected 1994)

Advice to successor: "Be true to your constituents always. Remember that they were the ones that elected you. Be a good listener to all points of view and build relationships with your colleagues."