

# Demmer winds down fourth, final term

## Former corn farmer plans to keep lending an ear to constituents

Editor's Note: As the 2010 session winds down, several members have announced their intentions to leave the Minnesota House of Representatives for new adventures. They leave a legacy of service that will remain part of legislative history.

By SUE HEGARTY

Whoever wins Rep. Randy Demmer's House seat this fall will likely face a similar state budget deficit as when Demmer first took office in 2002.

"It was a great challenge, and I remember that," said the four-term legislator.

Demmer (R-Hayfield) is stepping down from one seat, but not out of the political arena. He's the 2010 Republican-endorsed candidate for Congress from southern Minnesota's 1st Congressional District.

Growing up in Hayfield, Demmer worked on his family's corn and soybean farm. After a year at Colorado College, he returned to earn a business degree from the University of Minnesota. His entrepreneurial spirit inspired him to develop an accounting software program to help farmers manage their bookkeeping.

Demmer served on the school board, was active in several community organizations and converted his father's vacated farm implement dealership into an auto parts store while continuing to farm. All of the enterprises grew, acre by acre, store by store.

That's when former Republican House Speaker Steve Sviggum took notice and wooed the him to run for state office.

"I didn't know that much about politics at all. He convinced me it wasn't about politics; it was about representing people. ... He was right," Demmer said.

As a freshman legislator, he sponsored a bill to change the name of the Department of Children, Families and Learning back to the Department of Education. Although the bill was non-controversial, his elder statesmen couldn't let him get off that easy. "A few people had to ask questions. They had to come up with something to see if I could speak for myself at the podium."

Much more contentious was a bill that would have required school districts to complete contract negotiations with bargaining units prior to the start of the school year so that teachers could focus on teaching. If a contract couldn't be reached in the fall, they would have to suspend negotiations until the school

year concluded in the spring.

"It just removes an adversarial situation with adults while kids are present, because it should be about the kids," Demmer said. The bill didn't become law.

He became assistant minority leader in 2009. Duties included recruiting candidates, making committee assignments, managing Republican Caucus staff and creating harmony among members.

"We're all here for the same reasons. Sometimes we have differences of opinion about how to get there, but we have similar goals: No. 1 as legislators and people working for the good of the state of Minnesota, and No. 2 as conservatives who have a certain idea of how we'd like to see things done. Keeping that in mind has been helpful."

Regardless of his political future, Demmer said it's time to move on and let someone else contribute. "I think some turnover is good. It's a citizen Legislature and other citizens can come in and do this if you're willing to put in the time, and you come in with the right attitude of listening and remembering who you're here for."

Demmer has the support of his wife, Kathy and their three grown daughters as he moves into a new political arena. "It is public service. We both understand that. And this is something we can do. Her parents are there; my parents were there ... she had that support there and it's been a great thing for us."



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Randy Demmer is the Republican-endorsed candidate for the 1st Congressional District.

### STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Randy Demmer  
Republican  
District 29A - Hayfield  
Terms: 4 (elected 2002)  
Advice to successor: "Listen to all sides of arguments. Don't go with whims because you're going to get advice on all sides of an issue. Go with the principles and values you have."