

Opportunity knocks

After years of behind the scenes involvement, Kohls is now in the forefront as a representative

By JEFF JONES

Rep. Paul Kohls (R-Victoria) admits to having a self-interest in the transportation bonding bill (HF4) that he co-sponsors.



Rep. Paul Kohls

Unlike many legislators, “I have the luxury of being able to go home each night,” he says. But making the 35-mile trip means that, like many residents of his district, he must battle the traffic from the far western edge of the Twin Cities metropolitan area back into the city core each morning.

“Transportation was a big issue in my campaign,” Kohls said, “and I’m pleased to be a co-author on that legislation.”

Despite the commute, he says he wouldn’t want to live any place else. Kohls and his wife, Kelly, moved to Victoria after he graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1999.

“It was time to start a family,” said Kohls, whose wife grew up in nearby Waconia. “We made a decision we wanted to be out in the western suburbs. It’s a wonderful place to live and to raise a family.”

Though the district is on the border of suburbia, Kohls says it is made up primarily of small- to midsized-towns with a real sense of community.

When he moved to the area, Kohls was active on the executive board of former Senate District 43 and decided to run for office when redistricting resulted in an open House seat.

“I figured that at some point, somewhere down the line, I might run for office... (When) the opportunity presented itself, I figured it was a great chance to mix politics and policy.”

Kohls has been active in politics for many years. He was involved in the College Republicans organization as an undergraduate at the University of St. Thomas and worked on the communications staff for former-Gov. Arne

Carlson’s 1994 campaign. His active political participation waned somewhat during law school, but only three years after graduation, he now finds himself an elected representative.

“To be completely honest, I didn’t expect it would happen at this stage of my life,” Kohls said.

At age 28, Kohls is the fourth-youngest current member of the House. When people bring up his age, he tells them, “You know, I’m a father. I’m a homeowner. I’m a lawyer. I’m an earnest and serious person. Maybe it wouldn’t be right for some people, but I don’t think my age is going to be a hindrance in being an effective legislator, and an effective leader.”

Kohls has already taken the lead in co-sponsoring several other pieces of legislation,

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including the repeal of the Profile of Learning (HF37) and a bill to create tax-free zones in certain parts of the state (HF3).

He also introduced a bill (HF170) that would eliminate the legal practice called “forum-shopping” that allows lawyers to bring lawsuits in Minnesota after a statute of limitations has run out in other states, even if the case were unrelated to Minnesota.

Co-sponsoring that legislation is fellow freshman Rep. Chris DeLaForest (R-Andover), a classmate from law school. “Paul was an excellent student,” DeLaForest remembers. “He is very intelligent. He has a nimble mind... and that makes him a good attorney and an excellent legislator.”

Kohls said he is most looking forward to being a part of the legislative process and developing solutions during his freshman term. “The budget deficit has created a tremendous opportunity for us to redefine and revitalize government,” he said.

He says Minnesota provides an excellent level

of services to its citizens and that residents will continue to demand excellence. To do that and solve the budget problems at the same time will be a challenge but not impossible, he added.

Kohls said he thinks privatization may be the key. “There will be services that will be cut, there will be programs that will be eliminated, I am almost certain of that,” he said. “But (solving the deficit) is more than just cuts. It’s also looking for ways we can take certain government services and give serious consideration to privatizing some of those or at least opening up the bidding process to bring competition into the delivery of those services.”

Kohls said his first weeks as a legislator have been “amazing,” in particular a special moment he shared with his 23-month-old son at the Jan. 7 swearing in ceremony. “It was wonderful to be able to hold him in my arm and take the oath of office. When I raised my hand, however, he thought that he was supposed to give me a high-five. And so the whole time I

had my hand raised, he was giving me high fives.”

Should Kohls be re-elected to a second term, he may really have his hands full. He and his wife are expecting another child in March.

DISTRICT 34A

2002 population: 36,701

Largest cities: Chaska

Counties: Carver, Scott

Location: southwestern Twin Cities suburbs

Top Concern: “Our citizens are going to continue to demand we provide excellent service. We just need to find a new way to do it so that we can balance our budget deficit and pass a budget that the governor will sign – and that means a budget that isn’t going to raise taxes.”

— Rep. Paul Kohls