

One more goal in his playbook

Emmer leaving House in hopes of scoring the state's top job

By SUE HEGARTY

After scoring a hat trick — a skilled hockey player, family man and state representative — Rep. Tom Emmer (R-Delano) is chasing one more goal: he's vacating his House seat to run for governor.

Emmer views his legislative career as a team effort and a familiar play taken from life's playbook.

"I'm probably just like every other person who's born and raised in Minnesota. You're just trained to give back, you know. People who gave

to you set the example, and one day you find yourself coaching your kids' T-ball teams, and the next day you're sitting on a church finance council, and before you know it, you're on a city council and then somebody says, 'You know, you should run for the Minnesota House of Representatives,' and you're dumb enough to think it's a part-time job."

He shares another Minnesota virtue — a passion for hockey. He played a year of U.S. Junior Olympic hockey in Boston before returning home to help with the family lumber business. That's when he met his wife, Jacquie. The couple has raised one daughter and six sons, currently between the ages of 8 and 20, in Delano, a community he describes as "on the cusp of the metro."

When he was first elected to represent District 19B in 2004, Republicans held the majority in the House. He said it was a period of fewer committee hearings and "family-friendly" hours that enabled him to arrive at the Capitol around 5:30 a.m. and leave at 7 p.m. so he could coach hockey until 10:30 p.m. almost every night through March.

"You decide what level of involvement you want to have. For me, you're either all in or you're all out, so I've pretty much been all in."

One of the first bills he sponsored was a county border issue. The City of Rockford, largely in Wright County, had an isolated neighborhood in Hennepin County. To increase response times for emergency services such as

fire and police, the county border was moved so that the neighborhood could receive Wright County services.

He has sponsored many bills since then, including judicial topics. "I did learn very quickly that it's territorial around here. I was told privately that the judicial branch will take care of its own stuff."

Working at the Legislature is not that different from working in the private sector, he said. "It's all about relationships. You need to know the rules; you need to understand the process; then you just need to apply your interpersonal communications skills to building relationships so you can get things done."

There isn't one piece of legislation that defines his work; rather, it was being consistent and keeping his word.

"What I'm most proud of is that I've been true to what I've told my constituents that I would do; I have voted the way they expect me to.

He makes no apologies for his sometimes rigorous stance on the issues.

"We're supposed to be allowed to debate aggressively."


But like the end of a hotly contested game, "You need to be willing to walk across the aisle and shake somebody's hand and get them to recognize that, 'You know what, I'm just a human being like you.' It's up to you to take the initiative, to go and get to know someone and understand what drives them, what motivates them," he said. 



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Tom Emmer is vacating his House seat and running for governor.

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Tom Emmer

Republican

District 19B - Delano

Terms: 3 (elected 2004)

Advice to successor: "Just remember, it's all about serving. Learn the rules, read the bills, answer your constituents and when it's time, go home."