

A soldier on a new mission

Kriesel hopes to bring civility to the Capitol

By **NICK BUSSE**

For being a self-proclaimed ordinary “working class guy,” Rep. John Kriesel (R-Cottage Grove) has an extraordinary story to tell. Even a mere reciting of the facts is astonishing.



Rep. John Kriesel

A decorated veteran of the Minnesota National Guard, Kriesel lost both of his legs to a 2006 roadside bomb attack that also claimed the lives of two of his friends in Fallujah, Iraq. He died three times on an operating table, underwent 35 surgeries at four different hospitals, and spent nine months in rehabilitation at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

Painful though the experience was, Kriesel

said it made him a better man. He learned to prioritize the things that matter to him — his wife and two sons — and ignore the little things that people let themselves get worked up about.

“It completely changes your life and changes your mindset — in a good way. I’m much happier than I’ve ever been in my entire life,” he said.

At Walter Reed, Kriesel also met then-U.S. Sen. Norm Coleman, who gave him an internship. After his stint at the Capitol, Kriesel, who said his reverence for the political process can be traced to a high school class he took on American government, got infected with the political bug.

As a state representative, he hopes to bring a sense of civility and bipartisanship to a sometimes “toxic” political environment that he said turns off many people. He said he’s

DISTRICT 57A

Population (2009 est.): 39,513

Largest City: Cottage Grove

Counties: Dakota, Washington

Top Concerns: Balancing the budget, creating jobs

been encouraged by what he’s seen so far at the House.

“Sometimes the view you get on TV is that they all hate each other, and they don’t,” he said.

Like most of his colleagues, Kriesel’s focus this year will be on balancing the budget and on trying to grow jobs in the state. He hopes to show that lawmakers can work together, regardless of their differences, toward common goals.

“When I was in the military, it didn’t matter what the mission was. We worked together to get the job done,” Kriesel said.