

More or less

Republicans, DFL take different paths when establishing leadership structure

By **MATT WETZEL**

The DFL Caucus has slimmed down its leadership ranks for the 2005 session, and House Minority Leader Matt Entenza (DFL-St. Paul) believes it will allow for greater accountability.

The caucus met in a one-day retreat in December to organize and plan strategy. Entenza was elected minority leader; and Margaret Anderson Kelliher (DFL-Mpls) and Rep. Anthony Sertich (DFL-Chisholm) were elected minority whips.



**Speaker of the House
Steve Sviggum**

For the past two bienniums, when the party had fewer members than today, it had one whip who doubled as one of eight assistant minority leaders.

“We’ve gone up and down,” Entenza said. Caucus members agreed that three members on the leadership team seemed right for this session.

“Fewer people will mean a greater accountability and more responsibility,” Entenza said. “We know that we can rely on our lead Democrats to carry the ball in a lot of policy areas. They all have good backgrounds. Rep. Kelliher was our whip last year, and Rep. Sertich was a leader before.”

The term whip comes from Britain’s Parliament, where the job of the whip is to keep members of his or her party informed and counts the votes. It’s similar to an assistant minority leader here.

Entenza sees the role of the leadership as getting positive legislation passed. In the DFL’s case, that means creating better prospects for Minnesotans to succeed. “They need good opportunities in education, health care and transportation, so the people can have the

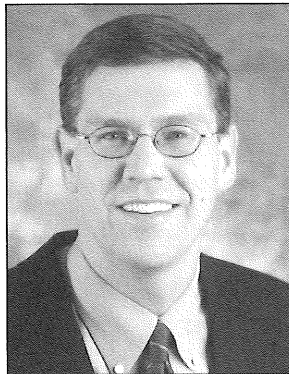
possibility of a great job and good health and a way to get to work,” he said.

“We think that work and health care are crucial because that’s one of the ongoing problems that business has right now, keeping good employees and keeping costs under control,” he said.

Across the aisle, the Republicans have nine members on the “executive board,” as House Majority Leader Erik Paulsen, (R-Eden Prairie), calls it. Each was appointed by House Speaker Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon) or elected by the caucus in a meeting after the election. Other members include Majority Whip Marty Seifert (R-Marshall) and six assistant majority leaders: Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague), Rep. Bob Gunther (R-Fairmont), Rep. Jeff Johnson (R-Plymouth), Rep. Maxine Penas (R-Badger), Rep. Tim Wilkin (R-Eagan) and Rep. Kurt Zellers (R-Maple Grove). The party has had a whip each of the last two sessions, with seven and six assistant majority leaders, respectively.

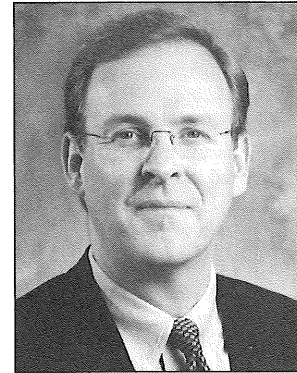
“I think it’s good to bring ownership to more people,” said Sviggum. “Obviously it’s tough to reach a decision with 50, 60, 70, 80 people. You have to have a small executive board. We think having a board of directors that is representative of the caucus is good and brings ownership back to the members of the caucus.”

Paulsen agreed, saying that the greater the caucus leadership, the more varied the opinions. “We have a wide spectrum of rural and metro. It employs the breadth of the caucus. It leads to more effective decision-making,” he said.



**Majority Leader
Erik Paulsen**

The leadership meets weekly to talk about legislation and discuss strategy. Paulsen said that too often legislators get an idea and introduce a bill before they’ve thought it out. With a large caucus, the legislator can bring it to the caucus meeting and bounce the idea around among his colleagues.



**Minority Leader
Matt Entenza**

Paulsen believes the main role of the leadership is communication with the caucus and the public on the caucus priorities, which this year includes funding for education, health care

and transportation.

Internally, he said members can get a heads-up on what’s going to happen on the floor and what the agenda should be. “They learn what’s important to members and what’s important to the district, and being attentive to individual members’ needs.”

State of the State update

Gov. Tim Pawlenty will go on the road this year to deliver his annual State of the State address.

Traditionally delivered at the State Capitol, plans call for the speech highlighting the governor’s legislative vision to be given at 11 a.m. Jan. 18 at the Mayo Clinic Superior Drive Support Center in Rochester.

Medical tests and blood and tissue testing are performed at the center, which is set to expand this year with the help of tax breaks under the state’s Job Opportunity Building Zones program.

“By taking the State of the State out of the Capitol, I hope to encourage all Minnesotans to take a greater interest in the work that will be done in St. Paul over the coming months,” Pawlenty said.