

No contest

Dawkins will step down and return to role as community advocate so family can finally unite under one roof

By MICHELLE KIBIGER

For five years, they've had a high chair, a set of toys, and a crib at each house.

Some nights they'd stay at her house, and some nights they'd stay at his.

But for Rep. Andy Dawkins (DFL-St. Paul), and his wife, Sen. Ellen Anderson (DFL-St. Paul), the time has come for their family to live under the same roof.

And that means Dawkins will not seek reelection this November.

"I made a promise to the family that when the kids would go to school we would live in just one house," Dawkins, 51, said. He and Anderson have two children — Nick, 2, and, Jack, 4, who will begin kindergarten this fall.

But the parting is bittersweet for the eight-term legislator.

"I have loved every day of this job," he said. "I hate the idea of leaving.

First elected to the House in a November 1987 special election, Dawkins filled the district-65A seat vacated by former Speaker of the House Fred Norton (DFL-St. Paul) upon his appointment to the state Court of Appeals.

Originally from Chicago, Dawkins came to Minnesota in the late 1960s to attend college at Hamline University in St. Paul. He said he was impressed by the open Minnesota political system, including precinct caucuses.

Ultimately, he moved to Philadelphia to work with homeless youth while attending law school. But he knew he would return to Minnesota.

And that's what he did in 1978, establishing both a neighborhood law practice in the Frogtown neighborhood of St. Paul and a personal goal of gaining election to the Legislature within 10 years.

Dawkins said it was important to him that he get to know the neighborhood and the concerns of residents, so he volunteered for a number of community organizations and the DFL party.

Since his election, Dawkins has served on several House committees, including those governing capital investment, family and civil law, energy and regulated industries, environment and natural resources, financial institutions and insurance, housing, jobs and

economic development, and taxes.

Dawkins is also remembered for when he vowed not to cut his hair until funding for government functions shifted away from property taxes. Within a year, higher income tax revenues provided more balance between the two taxes, he said.

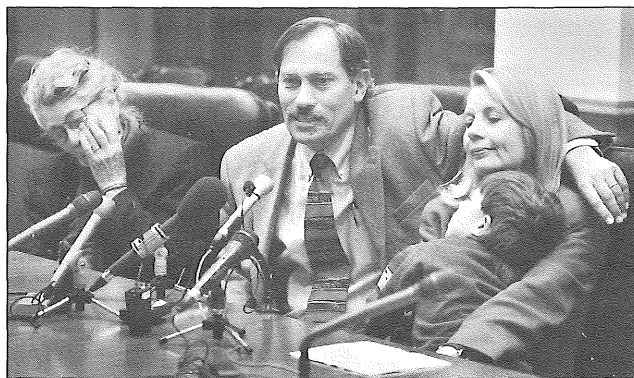


PHOTO BY TOM OLSMSCHEID

Grace Dawkins, left, wipes away a tear as her son, Rep. Andy Dawkins, center, reminisces March 26 about his legislative career. Dawkins' wife, Sen. Ellen Anderson, right, holds their 4-year-old son Jack during his comments.

He sponsored youth works legislation to provide college tuition to students volunteering in communities, much like the AmeriCorps program; the Great Northern Corridor economic development project; and a homeownership program for urban and low-income residents.

Dawkins also sponsored several measures in an effort to raise awareness of drug crimes and prostitution problems in Frogtown and to study racial bias in the state court system.

In 1993, Dawkins took a shot at the St. Paul mayor's office, challenging Norm Coleman, who defeated Dawkins and served two terms as mayor.

Dawkins said as a runner-up prize he decided to start a family, so in 1995 he married Anderson, who represents the Senate district just north of Dawkins' in St. Paul. He said they knew the day would come when they would have to decide which district to live in.

"For myself and for my family, I'm really thrilled," Anderson said. "But I do think it is a

loss for our city and for our state."

Rep. Tom Osthoff (DFL-St. Paul) agreed. He said that Dawkins' advocacy for the people of his district and true belief in his causes would be missed in the House.

Osthoff noted that Dawkins has truly grown and evolved as a legislator. "And that's the beauty of this place, that you get to meet people," Osthoff said, "and hopefully you get to understand them a little. Andy has come a really long, wonderful way in this Legislature."


Dawkins said he encouraged several community members last fall to start looking for candidates because of the possibility he would not run again. Several candidates have emerged, and he

said he's looking forward to the race.

His advice to his successor: establish specific goals and stay focused until they are accomplished; respect and use the legislative process, all the while holding to personal principles.

"To get there, sometimes you have to do things that people don't think lead to that," Dawkins said, referring to the necessary decisions legislators make to support projects in order to gain support from other legislators for their goals.

Rep. Ron Abrams (R-Minnetonka) echoed Osthoff's comments about Dawkins' effectiveness in working across partisan lines.

"He has contributed a great deal to public policy in Minnesota over the last 15 years," said Abrams. "I consider him a very good friend. I will miss him a great deal." 

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Andy Dawkins

DFL

District 65A — St. Paul

Terms: 8

Career notes: Dawkins served one term as chair of the Family and Civil Law Division of the House Judiciary Committee during 1997-98. He sponsored legislation to help divorced parents develop parenting plans and to establish the working family tax credit, which he considers among his primary achievements.