

New members . . .

## Kuisle weighs issues from urban, rural perspective

Rep. William Kuisle (R-High Forest Township) sees his Rochester-area district as a cross section of the Minnesota political landscape.



**Rep. William Kuisle** (pronounced KWEEZ-lee) says he must consider issues from a broad perspective. He must consider the effects legislation will have on constituents with diverse lifestyles, such as rural family farmers, medical professionals living on newly developed cul-de-sacs, and hourly wage workers renting apartments in the city.

"You have to make sure you're talking about issues that affect the whole district," Kuisle said. "Up here [at the Capitol], you see the split between rural and urban. I'm talking about what's best for both sides. I have to come up with something that can work for my district as a whole."

Kuisle, 39, is a dairy farmer who works the farm his family has owned since the 1930s. He got his start in politics at the local level when he was elected to the High Forest Township Board in 1987.

There, he served until elected to the Olmsted County Board in 1990. Kuisle resigned as a commissioner just days before being sworn in as a member of the House.

With all that experience in local government, Kuisle's decision to seek higher office may seem to be simply a natural progression. His story, however, is anything but typical.

District 31A includes a slice of Rochester's urban center, a portion that can best be described as suburban Rochester, and rural townships in Olmsted and Dodge counties.

Accordingly, Kuisle says he must consider issues from a broad perspective. He must consider the effects legislation will have on constituents with diverse lifestyles, such as rural family farmers, medical professionals living on newly developed cul-de-sacs, and hourly wage workers renting apartments in the city.

To get to the House, Kuisle had to get past a senior legislator from his own party. That person was Rep. Don Frerichs (R-Rochester), a 16-year veteran and a minority caucus leader.

Kuisle stunned Frerichs in the August 1996 primary election, and then held off a Frerichs write-in campaign in November. (No DFL candidate sought the seat.)

Pundits were quick to attribute Kuisle's primary win to his opposition to legalized abortion and support of Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, a political group that opposes abortion.

Kuisle said there was more to it than that. "My district is very unique," he said. "Only about 30 percent of the district is inside Rochester city limits. A lot of people thought [Frerichs] represented Rochester and overlooked the rest of it."

Kuisle's candidacy also created some controversy because of his switch in party affiliation shortly before his run for the House. Kuisle explains his jump to Republicanism with candor.

"I was on the wrong side, so I switched parties," he said with a laugh.

More seriously, Kuisle explains that his political values have not changed and that he found a more comfortable fit within the Republican Party.

"I've always been fiscally conservative," he said. "I treat the taxpayers' money as I treat my own money. I want to make sure it's spent wisely."

Kuisle's agenda centers on his support for welfare reform, his desire to protect family farmers, and his wish to crack down on crime.

A jump in crime overall and an increase in violence among juveniles have many people in the Rochester area concerned, Kuisle said.

He wants to see steps taken to prevent crime and to provide relief for overburdened local police and courts.

Where welfare reform is concerned, Kuisle sees an opportunity for the state to make real changes in the wake of federal reforms that will end many federal programs and send money to the states in the form of block grants.

"Anytime you talk welfare reform, you have to talk about moving people from welfare to work," he said.

Kuisle considers the split between urban and rural interests in the Legislature to be comparable to partisan divisions.

As he begins his legislative career, Kuisle is aiming to find solutions that best suit constituents who live in the country, the city, and everywhere in between.

"You've got to be willing to look at everything that comes up as to how it affects the whole district — and the whole state — not just part of it," he said. "You have to try not to be anti-urban or anti-rural. You have to find a balance."

— Nick Healy

### District 31A

**1996 population:** 34,162

**Largest city:** Rochester

**Counties:** Dodge, Olmsted

**Location:** southeastern Minnesota

**Top concern:** "Trying to deal with the crime in our district is going to be a top priority for the community in coming years. Right now, the county attorney's office is swamped with cases, the courts are getting swamped, the probation officers are swamped, the jail is overflowing. We're experiencing, like a lot of other communities in the state, a rise in crime and the after-shocks of dealing with it."

—Rep. William Kuisle

### It's a fact!

Before an overhaul of Minnesota's liquor laws in the mid-1980s, it was illegal to sell liquor to a "spendthrift, habitual drunkard or improvident person."

That and other "obsolete and unenforceable" provisions of state liquor law were the subject of a 1977 Department of Public Safety report recommending the repeal of several outdated prohibitions, according to a March 24, 1977, report in the *Minneapolis Star*.

Specifically, state law made it illegal for anyone except a licensed pharmacist to sell

liquor to spendthrifts and habitual drunkards within one year of notice by police, the person's parents or employers, or anyone "annoyed or injured by the intoxication" of such a person.

A similar measure also prohibited to sale of liquor to anyone identified as a "public prostitute."

The 1977 report amounted to a plea to the Legislature to update the existing liquor laws, most of which were written

early in the 1900s or shortly after the repeal of Prohibition.

Despite the urging of the public safety department, the 1977 Legislature left the archaic liquor laws on the books.

The provision forbidding sales to spendthrifts remained intact until it was repealed by the 1984 Legislature. In 1985, lawmakers completed a thorough overhaul of state liquor laws. The 1985 legislation wiped out archaic portions of the liquor law and increased the legal drinking age from 19 to 21.