

Excited for a new opportunity

Kohls leaves the House with fond memories, optimism about future

By **NICK BUSSE**

On the day Rep. Paul Kohls (R-Victoria) first arrived at the House of Representatives, he remembers feeling a sense of awe at the tremendous responsibility he had been given. Eight years later, the feeling hasn't gone away.

"I still do get a sense of awe when I walk into the chamber, and I'm glad that hasn't left me," he said.

Kohls' emotions are more mixed as he bids that chamber farewell. The four-term lawmaker and one-time gubernatorial candidate announced May 3 that he would not seek re-election. Having recently accepted a position at a financial services company, he said his new job won't accommodate continued service in the Legislature.

"I'm disappointed that I'm not going to be able to run for reelection, which I was planning to do, but I'm really excited about this new opportunity," Kohls said.

His departure marks the exit of a prominent voice in the House's Republican minority. Kohls, who admits to being one of the more vocal conservatives in the body, said he has a passion for both policy and politics. Over the years, he said it's been rewarding to be able to contribute to many of the important policy debates in the House.

"I've been a relatively outspoken member in terms of limiting the size and scope of government, and getting in control on spending," he said.

Kohls said he's been lucky to represent one of the state's most heavily Republican-leaning districts. That said, he's never

taken his constituents for granted. And despite his conservative roots and beliefs, Kohls has made many friends on both sides of the aisle, and said he's come to respect even those with whom he completely disagrees on major issues.

"What I appreciate now maybe more than the day I walked in is that we generally have the same goals," he said.

Kohls said the House is full of "first-rate" people from both parties, all of whom want a better future for Minnesota. His time in the

House has given him a deeper appreciation of the fact that each member is here representing approximately 38,000 people, he said.

"Over the years, I've often sat on the floor and looked around the chamber — looked at the governor give a State of the State, listened to an impassioned debate on the floor — and recognized that I've had the opportunity to be a part of something special," he said.

Kohls is proud of a number of local projects he was able to accomplish for his district, including an expansion of Ridgeview Medical Center, a pedestrian path around Lake Benton and various transportation projects. He's also been successful in passing legislation on statewide issues such as tort reform and identity theft.

As his legislative career winds down, Kohls said he is looking forward to spending more time at home. He feels especially indebted to his wife, Kelly, for supporting his service. The couple has two children, Stanley and Caroline. Kohls said raising a family while serving in the Legislature has been challenging — although no more so than for anyone else with a time-consuming career.

Though he isn't sure whether he'll run for office again someday, Kohls said he knows enough to "never say never." For now, he plans to make the most of his new job opportunity and see where it takes him.

"I leave with really fond memories of the institution and people, and I leave with an enormous amount of gratitude for having had the opportunity," Kohls said, adding, "This is such a special place." ❧



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

Rep. Paul Kohls, an "outspoken" Republican, said lawmakers from both parties have the same goals.

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Paul Kohls
Republican
District 34A - Victoria
Terms: 4 (elected 2002)
Advice to successor: "Don't forget where you come from."