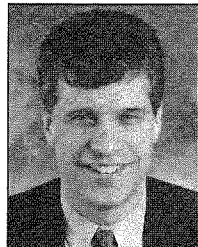


Right at home

After years as a prosecutor, referee, and school board member, Meslow's career brings him to St. Paul

By TOM LONERGAN

One might say Rep. Doug Meslow (R-White Bear Lake) has a pretty close relationship with rules.



Rep. Doug Meslow

As a high school football referee, he enforces them. As a prosecutor, he attempts to prove others have broken them. And as a freshman legislator, he's involved in making, changing, or repealing them.

One set of rules Meslow is quite familiar with is the state's criminal statutes. "I don't think we need to create more (definitions of) crimes," he said. However, he added, some laws already on the books can be improved.

Meslow has sponsored a bill (HF499) that would increase the penalty (from misdemeanor to a gross misdemeanor) for a person who refuses to take a chemical test and is convicted of driving while intoxicated. "The penalty for someone who cooperated shouldn't be higher than for the person who refused," Meslow said. A gross misdemeanor carries a possible 30-day jail sentence.

He's also co-sponsoring a bill to reduce the state definition of driving while intoxicated from the current 0.10 percent blood-alcohol concentration to 0.08 percent, the standard in 34 states. "Anything that reduces drinking and driving is a plus," Meslow said. There's also a practical side to changing the law, he added. "We need to do it to get more federal highway funding."

Federal highway safety grants to states under the 1998 Transportation Equity Act are tied to the 0.08 alcohol standard for drunken driving. If the level is not changed by Oct. 1, 2003 the state could lose federal transportation dollars.

For 12 years, Meslow has prosecuted adults accused of non-felony crimes like drunken driving, domestic assault, and theft. "Some were bad people and deserved to be locked up,"

he said. "Most were good people who did something they shouldn't have done. My role is not to condemn them."

Former Rep. Harry Mares, who co-chaired Meslow's campaign, approached Meslow about running for the House after the four-term legislator decided not to seek re-election last year. Meslow said he wasn't actively looking at getting involved in politics. "I was involved in my community. Politics found me."

Meslow's committee assignments include the House Education Policy, Higher Education Finance, and Judiciary Policy and Finance committees.

Examining the state's complicated K-12 funding formula for public schools will be among his long-term legislative priorities, said

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Meslow, who served for seven years on his local school board, and has two teenage sons. "During the last 35 years, there have been so many extras added to the basic formula," he said. "State funding no longer aligns with basic fundamental fairness. It's so complicated, no one can understand who the winners and losers are and why."

The state's Profile of Learning academic standards "did not do the job they were created to do," said Meslow, who voted for the House bill to repeal the profile. "Success or failure was defined by very subjective, very vague standards," he said. "We need high standards." Meslow said he "liked the idea that (the profile) was performance based."

Meslow said taxes and the state budget are district residents' top concerns.

"Given the size of the budget deficit and the problems we have to tackle, we're going to have to do things we don't want to do," Meslow said. That could include state aid cuts to higher

education, resulting in tuition increases. "My guess is there's not much chance to avoid a tuition hike," Meslow added. Century College, a two-year community and technical college with 10,300 students, is in his district.

Meslow has been a high school football referee for 21 years, continuing a family tradition of sports officiating that's included his parents, brothers, and wife, Jenny. His dad, Bob Meslow, is director of football officials for the Minnesota State High School League.

"Apples don't fall very far from the tree," said Bob, noting that his son became a high school official while he played football at St. Olaf College. "Now he's an umpire and gets right behind those big hulks on the defensive line," he added. "He's learned how to step in and bring peace to opposing factions."

Rep. Meslow, who has been part of the officiating team for several high school championship games, said, "I like to be in the middle of the action. I like the energy and excitement high school students have."

An avid runner, Meslow has a statue of his political hero in his office. It's Popeye, the

cartoon sailor. "Popeye always said 'I am what I am and that's all that I am,'" Meslow said. "He's there to remind me that I'm here to be myself, not to let ego get in the way and be real."

DISTRICT 53B

2002 population: 36,699

Largest city: White Bear Lake

County: Ramsey

Location: northeast Twin Cities metropolitan area

Top concern: "The deficit is so big, we're not going to reduce it just by being more efficient. It's a challenge to maximize what the state does best and limit the amount of pain that will come from the cuts we have to make."

— Rep. Doug Meslow

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