

A place on the bench

Abrams moves on to a different branch of government

Editor's Note: As the 2006 session winds down, several members have announced their intentions to leave the Minnesota House of Representatives for new adventures. They leave a legacy of service that will remain part of legislative history.

By **PATTY JANOVEC**

The engaging and hearty chuckle of Rep. Ron Abrams (R-Minnetonka) is easily recognized during a House committee meeting or floor session. Following a gubernatorial appointment, the candid representative is moving on to the Fourth Judicial District in Hennepin County after serving nine terms in the House.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty announced the appointments April 28 of three trial court bench vacancies, one of which was Abrams. "Ron has a well-earned reputation for fairness as a legislator, committee chair, and speaker pro-tem that crosses party lines ... His intellect, leadership, and sense of humor will be a great asset on the Hennepin County bench," the governor said in a press release.

Abrams said this of his judicial appointment, "Timing, we're towards the end of a two-year term and before the election cycle, I think that the political timing had a great deal to do with it." The new adventure is, "an entirely different branch of government dealing with legal disputes that will be contentious, and I'd like to think that I have a great deal to contribute in that area."

Closing in on 18 years of legislative service, Abrams said he is most proud of, "my ability to work with a large number of people, regardless of parties, on a number of contentious but interesting issues." Examples he included were workers compensation reform and a number of areas in taxes that go beyond the marquee items like the rebates and tax cuts of the late 1990s and the 2000-2001 era.

"Minnesota was one of the first states to

comply with the streamline sales tax model, ... And there are so many things that I have done in the tax and public finance area that I'm proud of," he added.

While there are some tax areas that Republicans and DFL leaders won't agree on, Abrams said, "I would hope that ... my successors in the tax area would be able to put policy ahead of politics, and continue to have some of the most innovative forward looking ideas in that area in the nation."

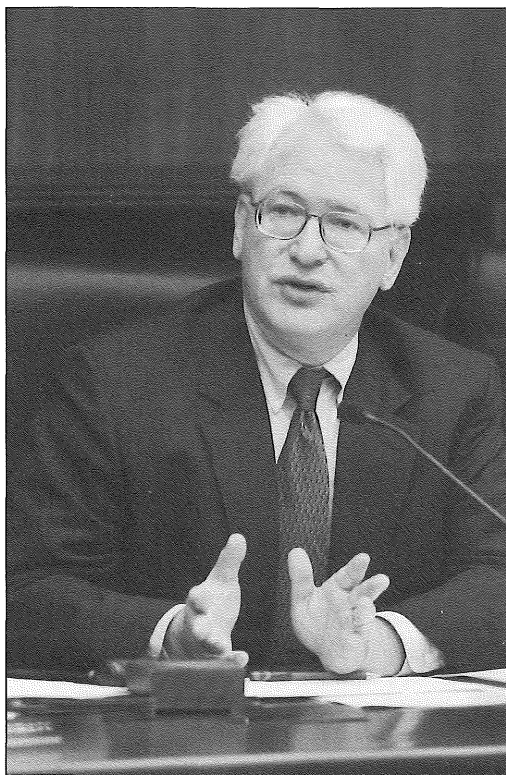


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

Rep. Ron Abrams was recently appointed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty to a judgeship in the Fourth Judicial District in Hennepin County.

Chair of the House Taxes Committee from 1999 to 2004, he said he enjoyed "the close working relationship with the nonpartisan House Research staff and the fiscal analysts. "They are an extraordinary group of people, and I really enjoyed working closely with them."

He serves on the following House committees: Higher Education Finance; Rules and Legislative Administration; Taxes and its Property and Local Tax Division; Transportation Finance; and Ways and Means.

Although actively participating the past two years on the sidelines of the taxes committee, Abrams shared these thoughts, "It's been a difficult two sessions for me. I've been trying to focus on issues that are of concern to Minnesotans and believe that a lot was accomplished, and hopefully we will have a good result of the 2006 session and have more good news for the people of Minnesota."

One of the biggest changes he has witnessed in his numerous terms in office is the velocity at which information now flows, he said. Additionally, "the ability of members to break through preconceived ideas and partisan labeling is a little less today than it was when I first got to the Legislature."

While not wanting to sound negative, he said in the big scheme he hopes members "understand how important the institution is and that there are ways in which you can let your viewpoints be heard without, in any way, showing up the institution."

While he is looking forward to the new opportunities, he will miss his constituents that have been passionate about their beliefs. "They have been invariably in good humor, and positive and extraordinarily kind to me and my family over the years."

Asked what he'll do with his time off, "I probably will go someplace with my wife. My youngest son is going to graduate high school so I'll be able to concentrate on those celebratory activities to the fullest."



STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Ron Abrams
Republican
District 43B — Minnetonka
Terms: Nine (elected 1988)

Advice for successor: Remember that it is an honor and a privilege to serve in the Minnesota Legislature. And that you ought to give back to the state far more than what you're getting with that honor and privilege.