

Health care marks Asch's journey to the House

Ask Rep. Marc Asch (DFL-North Oaks) how he got to the Minnesota Legislature and you'll hear a long list of professional accomplishments, most of which involve health policy and education.



Rep. Marc Asch

"I think problems are susceptible to study," Asch said. "You can gather information, review it, analyze it, talk about it, and make better decisions."

Asch, who brought his own computer to the Capitol and who has a self-professed love for number-crunching, is aiming to bring a passion for analysis to the Capitol.

It was in the early 1970s that Asch was exposed to the growing problem of health care costs while working at the Michigan Department of Social Services.

A major study on health costs piqued his interest in the issue, and Asch got an administrative job at a hospital where he worked to improve efficiency through "short interval work sequencing."

At the same time, Asch said his wife "ran into gross, overt [gender] discrimination" while applying to medical schools. Eventually, she was

accepted by Case Western Reserve University, so the couple moved to Ohio. Asch landed an administrative position quite close to his wife—in the dean's office of Case Western's medical school.

Four years later, Asch got a call from the office of U.S. Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio), who was looking for a "special assistant" on health care issues. So, Asch and his family were off to the Washington, D.C. area, where he spent two years on the senator's staff and another two years at the National Institute of Health as a legislative liaison.

They moved to Maine and back to Ohio before settling in Minnesota in 1987, when his wife, Susan, was asked to head a pediatric emergency room in the Twin Cities. She is currently in private practice in Stillwater.

Now representing St. Paul's northern suburbs, Asch describes his legislative priorities with the slogan, "fairness for the suburbs."

"I want to make sure that taxes are collected and distributed equitably," he said.

Asch said that his district, although relatively wealthy, was being hurt by state tax policies. "We were being done over. Our schools were on hard times. . . . the assumption is made that if you have a high-valued home that your income is also high. That's not necessarily true." This

practice unfairly taxes suburban home owners, he said.

Asch heard that frustration while on the campaign trail. "It wasn't the amount of taxes that people were paying that upset them," Asch said, "It was the feeling that taxes weren't being distributed fairly."

Asch also hopes to help shape the state's health care decisions. Noting that he has been involved in health policy from just about every possible perspective, "I intend to be an active participant," he said.

And those who drop by his office should not be surprised to see Asch and his staff crunching numbers and tossing around ideas in search of solutions.

—Adam Samaha

District 54B

Population: 32,583

Distribution: 100 percent live in urbanized areas

County: Ramsey

Largest city: Roseville

Location: northeastern Metro

1992 presidential election results:

Clinton/Gore: 46.8 percent

Bush/Quayle: 31.0 percent

Perot/Stockdale: 21.6 percent

Other: 0.6 percent