

Speaker pro tem

Bauerly takes a swing at pinch-hitting for speaker

Actors have their understudies, baseball teams their pinch-hitters, and even Johnny Carson was known to rely on a guest host or two.

The Minnesota House of Representatives also has its version of calling someone off the bench to get the job done.

This session is the first that Rep. Jerry Bauerly (DFL-Sauk Rapids) has been appointed the speaker *pro tempore*, as the position is officially known (*pro tem* for short), though he's had experience at the podium in the previous two sessions. As the Latin translation makes clear, the speaker pro tem assumes the speaker's role

on a short-term basis whenever the need arises.

"If Speaker Dee Long is to be out of town on a session day, or is tied up with a committee or a meeting or a speaking engagement, or something like that, then it's my responsibility to be the pinch-hitter," Bauerly said.

Sometimes the schedule change is known in advance, but at other times — especially when floor sessions get longer — it can be unexpected.

"Later in the session, the speaker has an incredibly overloaded agenda in terms of meeting with committee chairs, meeting

with Ways and Means folks, bonding committee folks, often meeting with the governor and the majority leader of the Senate," he said. In those grueling last days, it is often not physically possible for one person to preside over the lengthy floor sessions.

Because of the speaker's crammed schedule, Bauerly's duties include acting as liaison between Long and members of the DFL caucus. He also works with the majority leader and assistant majority leaders as part of his caucus' management team.

Historically, House rules have allowed for temporary speakers almost since statehood, but the actual practice has varied. In fact, having a representative specifically designated for the role for an entire session is a fairly new concept.

Before the 1980s, temporary speakers

could not serve for more than a day. And instead of being appointed by the speaker, they were chosen by a majority of the House or by the Rules Committee. Under current rules, if neither Long nor Bauerly is available to preside over floor sessions, the speaker will simply pick someone else to fill the post.

Bauerly doesn't consider himself an expert on parliamentary procedure, but he said he's worked hard at polishing those skills. Chairing a school board and other local organizations has helped, along with Chief Clerk Ed Burdick's training course on the subject.

The position requires quick, sure decision-making on a variety of issues that may appear mundane to some. But determining whether an amendment is "germane" to a bill is oftentimes no easy task. And the judgment often means the difference between its passage or defeat.

Those rulings can lead to the political tension that makes the democratic system work, said Bauerly. At the same time, he said he also has a duty to keep things moving.

"[You have to make sure] that everyone gets a chance to speak on a bill so you don't limit or stifle debate, and yet try and keep on the agenda and keep the process moving on a steady and methodical basis — so we can get our work done."

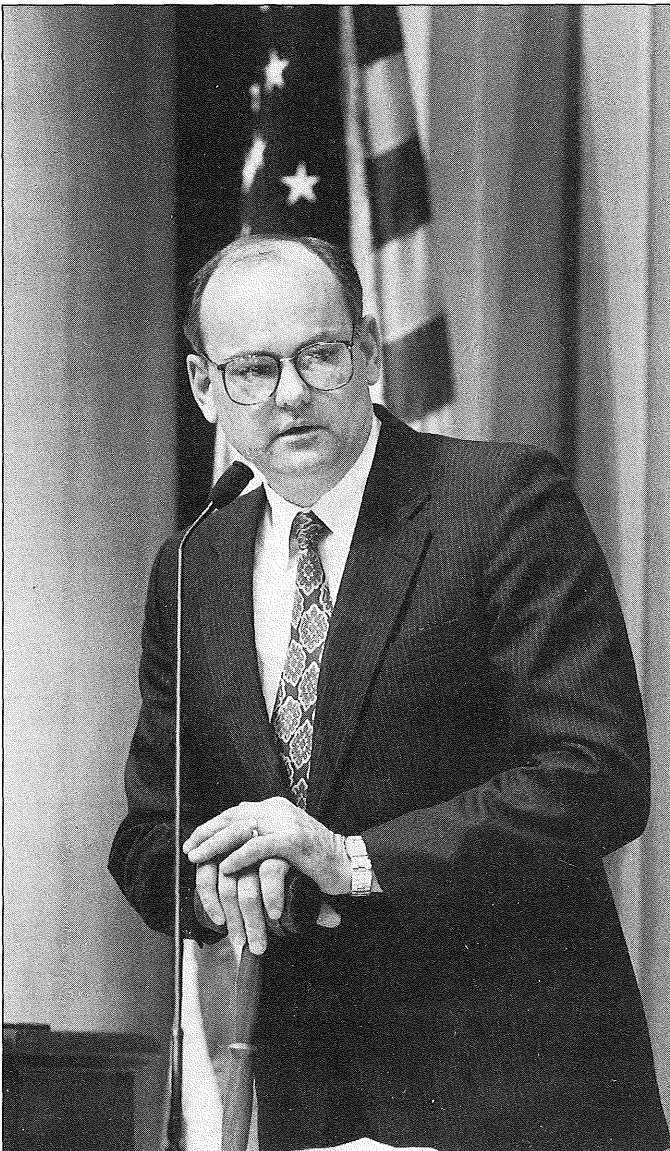
Bauerly takes his ascension from rank-and-file lawmaker to the speaker's chair in stride — even when switching roles is spontaneous.

"Actually, the first couple of minutes up there, until you get oriented to where everything is at, it is a little disconcerting," he said. "But I really enjoy it."

Burdick's well-versed crew at the House floor's front desk smooths the transition, he added.

"It really gives you a sense of humility, I think, in terms of knowing the expectation of incredible fairness and impartiality as you mete out the decisions between members," Bauerly said.

— Jim Anderson



Rep. Jerry Bauerly, speaker pro tem, assumes the speaker's role whenever the need arises.