

Rep. Jerry Bauerly . . .

Like Jefferson, Monticello farmer has many interests



Rep. Jerry Bauerly (DFL-Foley) has something in common with former President Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson took frequent breaks from political life to return to his home in Monticello, Va. Bauerly, after serving eight years in the House, plans to take time off and head to his farm 10 miles north of Monticello, Minn.

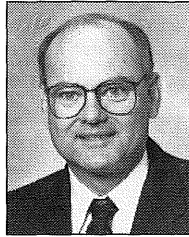
"I'm not cynical at all about the [political] process," Bauerly said, reflecting on time spent serving on two school boards and his years as a lawmaker. "I believe in a citizens' Legislature and I believe folks should leave their homes and jobs and come to St. Paul, then return to their homes and jobs so they can continue to have their fingers on the pulse of their communities," he said.

He came to politics through his first job, as a high school social studies teacher and coach at Sandstone-Finlayson High School just south of Duluth. After developing an interest in education policy, he then earned a master's degree in educational administration from St. Cloud State University. He also found time to serve six years on the Foley School Board and six years on the board of a private elementary school — St. John's Elementary School — in Foley.

After finding he wanted to have a hand in state education policy, Bauerly chose to make a run for the Legislature. In 1986, residents of central Minnesota elected him.

Once at the Capitol, Bauerly, 50, was named vice chair of the House Education Committee's K-12 Education Finance Division, a position he's held throughout his tenure at the Legislature.

He's known for his expertise on K-12 education issues and is considered one of the brightest people in the Legislature. He successfully pushed last year for a youth apprenticeship program to better prepare students



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Greatest accomplishment: Sponsoring bills that help distribute state aid to school districts equally regardless of whether the district has a low property tax base or a wealthy property tax base. The push for equalized funding occurred incrementally between 1986 and 1993.

He also enjoys responding to constituent concerns and passing bills that improve the quality of life of all Minnesotans. His political idol is former U.S. Sen. Hubert Humphrey, who once said:

"The moral test of any government is how that government treats those in the dawn of life, its children, those in the twilight of life, its seniors, and those in the shadows of life, its homeless, sick and poor."

for skilled employment. He also successfully sponsored legislation to reduce class sizes and to set up area learning centers for teenagers who dropped out of traditional high schools.

But he said one of his most important contributions was in incrementally boosting the level of state funding for "property-poor" school districts.

In 1988, a state district court ruled the state's K-12 education funding formula unconstitutional. Throughout his years in the Legislature, Bauerly helped find more money for property-poor districts to make the system more equitable.

In 1993, partially as a result of those efforts, the court ruled that the state's funding formula was constitutional.

In addition to serving as an expert on educational policy, Bauerly has also served for two years as speaker pro tempore and another two years as assistant majority leader. And in March 1993, Bauerly made a bid for the House majority leader post. He lost by a narrow margin, 44 to 42. Forty-four votes were needed to win.

"But we grow from these kind of experiences," he said.

In September, he tried again for a leadership position, this time for speaker of the House. Again, by a close vote, 44-41, Bauerly lost.

Neither those experiences nor the recent debate on term limits factored into his decision not to seek another term, he said.

His brothers have asked him to return to become president of Bauerly Brothers, a St. Cloud construction firm he and a brother founded in 1968. Today the company boasts 450 employees and all six Bauerly brothers are involved in its leadership, he said.

Bauerly expects to return to politics again some day, complete with the 18-hour days, which, for now, he won't miss. After all, Thomas Jefferson — in addition to writing the Declaration of Independence, serving as U.S. vice president and secretary of state — also served in the Virginia Legislature and as governor.

"There are elections every two years with plenty of offices available. We'll see how things go with the business and when an opportune time comes, I'll be back," he predicted.

—Jean Thilmany