

Rep. Pat Beard . . .

Return to steel mill offers 'rest' from Legislature



"Sometimes you just need to step back and catch your breath," explained Rep. Pat Beard (DFL-Cottage Grove), as he sat down to begin the third appointment he'd had in 20 minutes following a House floor session.

Beard said his decision not to seek reelection in November doesn't mean he's closing the door on a 12-year legislative career.

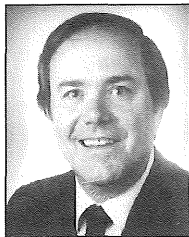
"I think everyone knows when they should take a break," he said. "But maybe I'll run again in 10 years."

Beard, who served six two-year terms between 1982-1994, represented District 56B until the 1992 reapportionment; then, District 57B.

A Vietnam veteran and 25-year employee of North Star Steel, Beard's legislative past reveals his efforts not to leave anyone behind.

As chair of the Veterans Affairs Division of the General Legislation, Veterans Affairs and Gaming Committee for several years and longtime member of the Labor-Management Relations Committee, Beard feels the bulk of his accomplishments lie in the areas of veterans affairs and workplace safety.

The most memorable were two resolutions Beard helped to pass in 1991 relating to prisoners of war (POWs) and those missing in action (MIAs). One asked the U.S. Congress to continue funding the POW/MIA special investigation conducted by the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The other urged the U.S. Congress to enact the



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Greatest accomplishment: Helping to pass two resolutions relating to POWs and MIAs. The first, approved in 1991, asked Congress to continue funding investigations to locate POWs and MIAs. The second asked the federal government to release all information regarding any MIA soldier.

"We had about 40 states follow us right after [we passed those resolutions], and Congress opened up all the hearings [about missing soldiers]," Beard said. "At that time, there were over 88,000 people listed as MIAs."

POW/MIA truth bill relating to the disclosure of live sighting information on American service personnel missing in action from World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.

Minnesota's initiative had a domino effect; at least 40 other states followed with similar laws, Beard said. As a result, the federal government opened to the public all its hearings relating to war prisoners and soldiers listed as missing in action.

Debating bills and passing new laws may have kept him busy, but the day-to-day interaction with well-informed people are what Beard has most enjoyed as a House member.

"You meet a lot of really nice people, very knowledgeable people, and I'll miss that," he said.

From House and DFL researchers, to lobbyists, to individual constituents who have contacted him, Beard says the "wealth of information around here" has kept him constantly amazed.

Beard says his retirement is not a self-

imposed term limit. He explained that just one of his four sons is still at home, and he hopes to spend more time with him while he still has the chance.

And although the physical demands of his full-time steel career may take their toll on the 46-year-old legislator, those demands don't begin to outweigh the challenges he's faced as a lawmaker.

"I'm going back to the steel mill and rest," he said.

For now, it's time to put politics aside and concentrate on some of Minnesota's more leisurely pastimes.

"I'll do some fishin'," Beard said. On second thought, he added, "a lot of fishin'."

—Amber Brennan