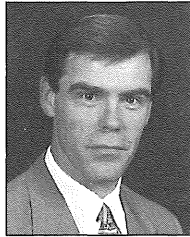


Republican educator seeks voice in K-12 debates

By Paul Wahl

Rep. Mark Buesgens (R-Jordan) has been an educator all of his adult life, and he approaches life from an educator's viewpoint.



Rep. Mark Buesgens

In many ways, he views his recent election to the House as the latest in a series of assignments, albeit a formidable one.

"Educators get into the field not because they love to teach but because they love to learn," Buesgens said. "I look forward to

the challenge of learning as much about the House as fast as I can."

Buesgens (pronounced Bisk-enz) is a native of Jordan, Minn., and is the youngest of nine children. After graduating from Jordan High School and later earning a degree in math education at Mankato State University, he took a teaching job at a private American school in balmy Guayaquil, on Ecuador's west-ern edge.

"I had just graduated and had three brothers in the military overseas," Buesgens said. "I spoke one word of Spanish and that was 'no,' the same as in English."

The language barrier wasn't a problem during the day because courses were taught in English, but Buesgens had other reasons to learn Spanish.

He soon learned enough to say, "Quiero que me casas?" to his future wife, Sara, and the couple's first child was born in Ecuador. After four years, they returned to Minnesota.

"Ecuador is a beautiful country, but it's still the Third World and we wanted to raise our children in the States," Buesgens said. "With everywhere open to us, we ended up moving back to Minnesota just because of the quality of life."

They soon had three more children, and the family recently welcomed an Ecuadorian foster son.

Buesgens' teaching assignments since Ecuador have included seven years as a math instructor and curriculum planning positions in the Chaska and Rosemount/Apple Valley/Eagan school districts. His most recent job was assistant principal at Blackhawk Middle School in Eagan.

The family has continued to live in Jordan. Buesgens' introduction to public service came when he joined the town's volunteer fire department. In 1996, at the urging of his fellow firefighters, he ran for a seat on the Jordan City Council and won.

His interest in state office began with a phone call from state Sen. Claire Robling (R-Prior Lake) who urged him to consider running.

"And after months and months of soul-searching and talking to other people and talking with my wife, we decided to make a go of it," Buesgens said.

He knew the task would be gargantuan. His opponent, former Rep. Becky Kelso (DFL-Shakopee), had served 12 years in the House and had an excellent reputation as a leader on education issues. In fact, Kelso was chair of the

House panel that handled K-12 education finance.

As a Republican, Buesgens is in the minority among educators, and he said he takes good-natured ribbing from his colleagues. Upon moving into Buesgens' former office, one colleague declared, "That picture of Ronald Reagan has to come down."

The new lawmaker said he expects to spend the first part of the session learning and connecting with people.

As a member of the House Education and the K-12 Finance committees, he said he expects to delve into the issue of state and local funding splits for public schools. And although he said he doesn't have a target percentage in mind, he believes there must be a considerable local effort.

"One of the critical components in making public schools work is for the public to feel ownership of their schools," he said. "When we pay for something, versus when we get it free, we take more responsibility for making it successful."

District 35B

1995 Population: 37,256

Largest city: Shakopee

County: Scott

Location: southwest metropolitan area

Top concern: "I believe that the framers of our country envisioned that the most important vote a person could cast would be for mayor and city council members. I am motivated to help reverse the trend of the larger and expanding role of state government in people's lives."

—Rep. Mark Buesgens



The election of a Reform Party governor has caused several snags in how state government operates. The most recent of which involves an appointment to a vacancy on the state's Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board.

State statute provides that one of the board's members "shall be a former member of the Legislature from the same political party as the governor." There are two former legislators on the board.

"There are no former members of the Leg-

islature from the same political party as the governor," said Jeanne Olson, executive director of the board.

The board will ask the Legislature to change the wording to solve the problem, allowing Gov. Jesse Ventura to fill the appointment. The board is suggesting appointments be either "two former members of the Legislature who shall not support the same political party" or "two former members of the Legislature from different major political parties."

The board term of Carolyn Rodriguez, a former DFL legislator, expires this month. She did not reapply. If the Legislature approves the statute change, Ventura will likely have to appoint another former DFL lawmaker to fulfill the criteria.

Hormel Foods Corp. executive Brian Stevens couldn't resist getting in a plug for one of his company's most popular Minnesota-produced products when he testified at a hearing on pork prices before a joint hearing of two House agriculture committees Jan. 7.

"Now I know that if I went around this room, not one of you would admit to eating Spam," Stevens said.

Nevertheless, he declared, someone is obviously eating it.

"We produce 450 cans of Spam a minute," he told the committee members.