

A distinctive voice departs

A staunch conservative, Buesgens was more principled than partisan

By Nick Busse

Rep. Mark Buesgens (R-Savage) says he wouldn't change a thing about his 14 years of service in the House of Representatives. All the same, he plans to step down after finishing out his current term. His reasons are personal.

"It's time, that's all. Nothing more deep or philosophical," Buesgens said.

His exit will mark the departure of one of the Legislature's most conspicuous and unique conservative voices. His floor speeches are frequent and prodigious, and his eagerness to express his opinions is matched by a devotion to principle that occasionally

puts him at odds even with his own party.

"More often than not, the Republican party agrees with the way I see the world. But when we disagree, I believe I owe it to my constituents to behave in the way I said I was going to," he said.

A teacher and school administrator, Buesgens arrived at the House in 1999 seeking to provide a conservative voice in K-12 education policy debates. He got his wish, eventually chairing the House Education Policy and Reform Committee, but his work in the House reached far beyond education.

Buesgens spent his seven terms in the

House working to protect, in his words, his constituents' "liberty" and their "ability to live their life as they choose." Every vote he's taken as a legislator has been to those ends. But his personal brand of conservatism is rooted in deeply held personal beliefs more than partisanship. He said he has always tried to show respect for his colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

"I hope I've treated people with kindness and respect, and for the most part kept the differences of opinion to policy and not personality," he said. "That's been very important to me."

The first bill he sponsored that became law allowed parents to civilly commit their 16-to-18-year-old children to chemical dependency treatment programs. Prior to that law, Buesgens said the

teenagers essentially had "veto power" over their parents.

"I had a constituent who was living that, and couldn't get their son help because their son didn't want help," he said.

Buesgens said the legislation he's most proud of expanded the ability for K-12 students to access online learning options. The law was sponsored in the House by Buesgens, in the Senate by a DFLer and signed by Gov. Jesse Ventura, resulting in what Buesgens calls a "tripartisan" success.

Buesgens dismisses the notion, often repeated by lawmakers, that the Legislature has grown more partisan over the years.

"It was partisan when I came here 14 years ago, it's as partisan now," Buesgens said. "I don't think I've seen a lot of changes, and that's the system I think the founders developed is one where change happens very, very slowly, and that's a good thing. It really is," he said.

Asked what advice he would give to those lawmakers who come after him, Buesgens said to study history and learn from the past. He recounts a quote widely attributed to Isaac Newton: "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

"In other words, if you've got some idea of advancing the state, don't believe you've been endowed by God with some new gift or insight. It's your job to learn from what's happened before to take us to the next step. ... Put your ego aside and learn from others," he said.

Buesgens, a husband and father of four, said he isn't sure what comes next for him and his family. He knows only that he's happy to have had the opportunity to serve as a small piece in the great puzzle of the Minnesota Legislature.


"It's still incredibly awe-inspiring to have been one of nine children of a very blue-collar family from small town Jordan, to have served in this honored institution. It's incredible, and yet I'm still a small speck in the grand scheme of things, and I realize that now more than ever," he said. 



PHOTO BY PAUL BATTAGLIA

Rep. Mark Buesgens has spent 14 years in the House of Representatives, but he is not seeking re-election. He's a staunch supporter of letting people "live their life as they choose."