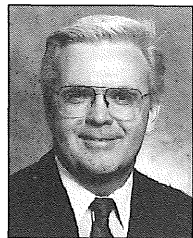


Newcomer Carlson makes policy by the numbers

For an accountant who admits that many in his profession are "shy" and "not risk takers," Rep. Skip Carlson is entering a world where such attributes are fairly uncommon.



Rep. Skip Carlson

Carlson, a Republican from Fridley, is one of the newest members of the Minnesota House of Representatives. He was elected July 11, 1995, in a special election to fill the District 52A seat which includes parts of Fridley and New Brighton and all of Columbia Heights and Hilltop, all suburbs of Minneapolis.

The 51-year-old accountant and insurance salesman replaces former Rep. Wayne Simoneau, a 21-year legislative veteran who resigned to become acting commissioner of the state Department of Employee Relations.

Carlson's victory over his DFL opponent, Bruce Nawrocki, marks the first time in generations that the district has been represented by a Republican.

In fact, when Carlson graduated from Columbia Heights High School in 1962, Nawrocki already was the mayor of Columbia Heights.

Carlson's win marks his first run at elective office. Prior to this, the closest he'd ever come was serving as treasurer in another political campaign. When Carlson was approached to

run for the seat, he said thanks but no thanks.

"I think I was going through a mid-life crisis," the 51-year-old said jokingly.

But after much thought, I decided that "I can't complain . . . if I sit on the sidelines," he said.

Last spring, Carlson became a first-time grandfather and he thinks his grandson, Nathan, may have had something to do with his running for office.

"I turned 51 . . . you see your own mortality. . . . Sometimes I hold my grandson and consider he's already in debt and he doesn't know it. If there is a way to turn the state over to [him] in better shape, I want to do it."

Carlson, an active community member, is a member of the Anoka Rotary, the National Sports Center Foundation, and the Anoka County Internal Audit Commission. He has been president of both the Anoka Area Chamber of Commerce and the Anoka County Chamber of Commerce.

After growing up in northeast Minneapolis and Columbia Heights, he served in the Army, attended the University of Minnesota, and later graduated from St. Cloud State University. He has been married 28 years.

Carlson said he really doesn't have a personal agenda but is interested in reforming the state's tax system and working on education funding issues. That should work out well for him: He has been selected as one of the few freshmen members of the minority party to sit on the powerful House Taxes

Committee, where he expects his accounting background will come in handy.

Carlson said he is looking forward to the busy pace of the session. With his children grown and his wife, Shirley, owning her own business, he feels he has the time to devote to the job.

"I can't imagine having a young family. . . . I don't think I would apply for the job," he said.

The new lawmaker's hobbies include baby-sitting his new grandson and reading—especially about the Civil War. "Not so much the battles," he said, "but the human side and personal conflicts."

Remembering the human side of the lawmaking process is something Carlson hopes will serve his constituents well.

— K. Darcy Hanzlik

District 52A

Population: 32,890

Distribution: 100 percent urban

County: Anoka, Ramsey

Largest city: Columbia Heights

Location: north central Metro

Unemployment rate: 5.98 percent

Residents living below poverty level: 7.98 percent

1994 gubernatorial election results:

Carlson/Benson 62.32 percent

Marty/Larson 30.44 percent

Other: 7.24 percent