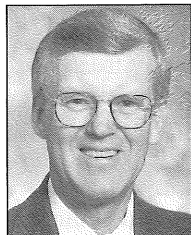


# For Cassell, helping schools supercedes other concerns

By Sarah Hallonquist

Rep. George Cassell (R-Alexandria) used to be a cowboy, but when it came to running for the Legislature, it was Cassell who had to be roped in for the job.



Rep. George Cassell

He was barely a year into his retirement as a school superintendent when Alexandria community leaders asked him if he'd consider running for the House seat vacated by former Rep. Hilda Bettermann.

Cassell, 63, had been looking forward to a less public lifestyle and initially wasn't sure if he was up for a legislative career. But after talking it over with family members and doing a lot of thinking, Cassell and his wife, Carol, decided to accept what they considered another call to serve the public.

For now, he's put off work on his 80-acre hobby farm outside Alexandria, and stays in a rented apartment in downtown St. Paul during the week.

The former Wyoming cowboy keeps a cowboy hat with a snakeskin band hanging in his office, and he jokingly threatens to wear his spurs onto the House floor if he needs to dig in his heels during debate. His well-worn boots sit waiting near the cowboy hat.

Carol works alongside her husband almost every day. Behind a laptop computer and seated at a table stacked with papers, she helps him stay organized and efficient.

She's used to the task, having moved with him between various teaching and superintendent positions from Minnesota to Idaho to Wyoming and back to Minnesota. Married in 1955, the couple has three grown children — Susan, George Jr., and Robert — and nine

grandchildren. Two more grandchildren are on the way.

After retiring from education in 1997, Cassell thought he'd have some time to travel and get away from life in a fishbowl.

He was superintendent of the Alexandria schools for 10 and one-half years. Before that, he held two other superintendent positions, directed a special education center, led an elementary school as a principal, coached track and basketball, and worked as a school administrator while teaching middle school students.

Less than a full month after his retirement, Cassell received a request to be an interim superintendent in Herman, Minn. He took the part-time position, unwilling to refuse the call for help.

The Cassell family has almost always had a busy schedule. Right out of high school in Tomahawk, Wis., George traveled to Wyoming to work on a ranch. After nearly a year, he received a draft notice, so he returned to Wisconsin and joined the Coast Guard.

The Cassells were married in 1955 and spent the last three years of George's tour of duty together. Their first child was born in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., just before they were transferred to Rhodes, Greece, and their second child was born in Africa just before they returned to the United States. After his discharge, Cassell worked for his father while going to college to begin his career in education. The couple's third child was born during Cassell's first year in college.

Although they've often yearned to live a quieter life, the Cassells have resolved to embrace whatever comes their way.

"We just try to enjoy life and make the best out of whatever we're doing," Carol said.

Cassell's legislative priorities reflect his experience and thoughtful approach to his job.

He is sponsoring a bill (HF355) that would repeal a law requiring some businesses to pay their sales taxes in June. The law was passed in the 1980s when the state needed the early payments to balance its budget, but Cassell said the law is not necessary anymore. He also supports lowering property taxes, a system that he believes is regressive.

Cassell earned his degrees — all the way up to a doctorate — at universities, but he also believes practical experience can help educators as much as anything when they are learning the trade.

Between three states, Cassell has 35 years in education under his belt. Minnesota's system is one of the best, he said.

He supports local control of schools and firmly believes teachers have the best perspective on solutions to classroom problems.

As a superintendent, he said he tried to allow teachers to seek creative solutions to classroom problems, rather than addressing them with top-down mandates.

"I think we've ignored that principle in many of the recent innovations we have attempted in education," he said.

Cassell said his philosophy as a superintendent was that "great things happen when we work together and do not care who gets the credit." And, he said, that philosophy has followed him to the House.

## District 10B

1995 population: 34,942

Largest city: Alexandria

Counties: Douglas, Pope, and Stearns

Location: west-central Minnesota

Top concern: "The two major issues are the rapidly accelerating property taxes and assuring there is local control of education."

— Rep. George Cassell

## Frequently called numbers

(all numbers are area code 651)

### Secretary of the Senate

231 Capitol ..... 296-0271

Voice mail/order bills ..... 296-2343

### Chief Clerk of the House

211 Capitol ..... 296-2314

### Index, Senate

110 Capitol ..... 296-2887

### Index, House

211 Capitol ..... 296-6646

### Information, Senate

231 Capitol ..... 296-0504

### Information, House

175 State Office Building ..... 296-2146

Committee Hotline, Senate ..... 296-8088

Committee Hotline, House ..... 296-9283

### Sergeant at Arms, Senate

Senate Chamber ..... 296-7159/6-1119

### Sergeant at Arms, House

45 State Office Building ..... 296-4860

### Legislative Reference Library

645 State Office Building ..... 296-3398

### Revisor of Statutes

700 State Office Building ..... 296-2868

### Governor's Office

130 Capitol ..... 296-3391

### Attorney General's Office

102 Capitol ..... 296-6196

### Secretary of State's Office

180 State Office Building ..... 296-9208

### Capitol Security

B-4 Capitol ..... 296-6741

Emergency ..... 296-2100

TTY\*, Senate ..... 296-0250

Toll free ..... 1-888-234-1112

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