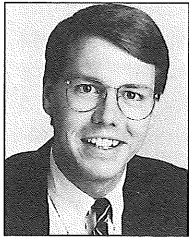


# 'Compassionate conservatism' guides Commers

National figures and U.S. politics have provided formative lessons for Rep. Tim Commers (IR-Mendota Heights).



Rep. Tim Commers

"From the day I entered high school in ninth grade until the day I left college, Ronald Reagan was president of the United States." And that fact, Commers said, is what defined his own political agenda and his conservative philosophy of government.

At 26, Commers is the youngest House member. But despite his youth, he is no stranger to the workings of the legislative process.

In 1986, he interned for former U.S. Sen. Rudy Boschwitz. After graduating from St. Olaf College, Commers went to work for former U.S. Rep. Vin Weber's congressional campaign. He later served as a legislative aide to Weber, focusing on a variety of issues including foreign affairs, national defense, environment, housing, and veterans affairs.

When former state Rep. Art Seaberg opted to run for the state Senate, the way was cleared for Commers' first election bid. He describes his district as Republican-leaning, where residents

are "generally fiscal conservatives."

"Are you an incumbent?" was a question Commers heard repeatedly during his campaign, making him thankful that he was not.

"I don't think people were angry, but frustrated," Commers explained, saying that voters were enticed by Texas billionaire Ross Perot's agenda of change.

Aside from avoiding any tax increase, Commers listed political reform at the top of his own legislative agenda. Reducing political action committee (PAC) influence in Minnesota politics is an achievable goal, said Commers. "I don't think we'll get rid of PAC money, but I think we can lessen the amounts contributed." Commers, himself, did not accept PAC money in 1992.

Commers believes that issues raised by Republicans in the last decade remain pertinent to Minnesotans today. "Taxes keep going up, spending keeps going up," Commers said, adding that commercial real estate taxes and rising workers' compensation costs hurt the state's economy.

His stint in the nation's Capitol taught him to appreciate that there are few black and white answers when formulating policy.

"I think that when you go to work in Washington you see things are a lot more gray."

But that hasn't stopped Commers from forging a firm political philosophy. He supports the

"empowerment" ideas of Jack Kemp and others, whom Commers calls "compassionate conservatives."

"When you talk about welfare reform, you're not talking about throwing women with two kids out on the snow bank," Commers said. He explained that his brand of conservative policy would actively assist the transition from welfare mother to fully employed taxpayer.

So far, Commers is thoroughly enjoying the chance to voice his political philosophy as a public servant.

"It's a very fun job. It really is," said Commers. "Every day is different and it's always interesting."

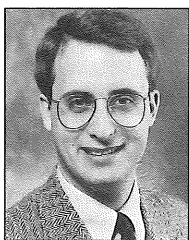
—Adam Samaha

## District 38A

**Population:** 32,186  
**Distribution:** 100 percent urban  
**County:** Dakota, Goodhue  
**Largest city:** Burnsville (portion)  
**Location:** southern Metro  
**1992 presidential election results:**  
 Bush/Quayle: 35 percent  
 Clinton/Gore: 41 percent  
 Perot/Stockdale: 23.5 percent  
 Other: 0.5 percent

# Army veteran Bergson to combat status quo

The blur of the campaign season has given way to the realities of public service for Rep. Brian Bergson (DFL-Osseo).



Rep. Brian Bergson

"It really hadn't set in until I got into my office. You know, here I am. The responsibility is starting to hit me."

Bergson comes from a politically active and service-oriented family that settled in Duluth. "Growing up, my heroes were politicians," he explained.

He takes inspiration from his ancestors and brother, who is the current mayor of Superior, Wis. And a century ago, a relative of Bergson's served in the state Legislature after fighting in the Civil War.

Bergson himself served 10 years in the U.S. Army Reserves and also worked at the state Department of Veterans Affairs until 1990. In August of that year, Bergson volunteered to go to the Persian Gulf, although the war was over by the time his training was complete.

Bergson entered the District 48A race because of philosophical differences with another DFL aspirant. Winning the hotly contested party en-

dorsement and the later primary, Bergson expected to run against nine-term incumbent Rep. Bill Schreiber (IR-Brooklyn Park). But Schreiber opted to run for the Hennepin County Board, and Bergson bested another challenger to represent the traditionally conservative district. At age 28, he is the House DFL Caucus' youngest member.

Bergson describes his district as economically diverse with a large portion of young families. He said the area suffers from a low commercial tax base, especially in Champlin, and he would like to help draw businesses into the area.

But perhaps the most pervasive characteristic of Bergson's district is voter anger. Repeating a mantra heard often during this past election cycle, Bergson said, "People are sick and tired of business as usual" in government and that "they're ticked off about paying taxes."

Bergson feels that the prevailing mood against the status quo in American government helped him get elected. He added that the high rate of turnover — there are 34 first-termers — is a sign that democracy works and that term limits aren't needed. Still, other reform ideas that promote "government responsiveness" and "inclusion" are important to Bergson and his constituency.

The issues voters seemed most angered and

frustrated by are those that Bergson plans to stress during the upcoming session. These include "crime against women and families," property taxes, and traffic congestion on highways 169 and 610, the two most frequently traveled routes going south to Minneapolis and St. Paul from northern Hennepin county. "[Highway] 169 is two lanes wide in my district and it's just packed," Bergson said.

But his plans require something of which the state is in short supply: money. It is an obstacle he knows that youth, excitement, and commitment to public service cannot, by themselves, overcome.

—Adam Samaha

## District 48A

**Population:** 33,322  
**Distribution:** 100 percent urban  
**County:** Hennepin  
**Largest city:** Brooklyn Park (portion)  
**Location:** northern Metro  
**1992 presidential election results:**  
 Bush/Quayle: 32.7 percent  
 Clinton/Gore: 39.1 percent  
 Perot/Stockdale: 27.7 percent  
 Other: 0.5 percent