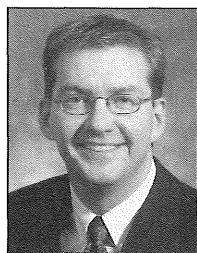


Taking the next step

Dibble moves from being a neighborhood activist to working on issues of more state impact at the Capitol

BY DAVID MAEDA

It was a natural career progression from his community activism. That's how Rep. D. Scott Dibble (DFL-Mpls) viewed his decision to run for a seat in the Legislature.



Rep. D. Scott Dibble

Long active in his southwest Minneapolis neighborhood as an organizer and coalition builder, Dibble had already spent much time at the Capitol working with his legislators.

"People would ask me 'When are you going to run for office?' and my stock response was, 'I don't know,'" he said, since the idea was not at the forefront of his mind.

Dibble's interest in politics began when he attended the University of St. Thomas in the mid-1980s. At the time the HIV/AIDS crisis was just entering the public consciousness and Dibble joined others in trying to help shape an effective public policy for "one our most complex social issues."

Along with health issues and trying to find a cure and stop the spread of the disease, Dibble, who is openly gay, said issues like personal privacy, returning to the workplace, housing access, class, race, and homophobia are also important to him.

As a neighborhood activist he worked against the expansion of I-35W and for a reduction of airport noise. He said developing a statewide comprehensive transportation plan and affordable housing issues were other areas he worked on.

Dibble said he and the other neighborhood leaders soon learned their grassroots efforts were greatly helped by reaching out to all sectors of the community, and building partnerships with different groups, including the DFL party.

He served six years as an aide for Minneapolis City Council Member Dore Mead and currently holds the part-time position as the Loring Park executive coordinator.

When longtime state Sen. Allan Spear decided not to run for another term Dibble said Spear encouraged him to run for office. Then when Sen. Myron Orfield (DFL-Mpls) announced he was running for Spear's seat in the Senate, Dibble said the time felt right to take his community activism to the next level.

His run for office turned out to be quite a rewarding experience. "It was a really dynamic campaign that brought in a lot of people who never had been involved with working on a campaign," he said.

Dibble said the efforts of those that

Valley High School where he was a classmate of Rep. Chris Gerlach (R-Apple Valley). He said he learned that the state's traits are like no other.

"There is a unique character of the community," he said. "It's almost like living in a small town. I'm well connected with all my neighbors. We know each other and are involved in each other's lives."

For the most part he said the focus during the campaign was on the issues concerning his constituents and not on him being a gay candidate. He was proud of his district and of the people of the state because he received no hate mail during the campaign.

"I've been very forthright about (my identity). It's an important part of who I am," he said.

Dibble said he occasionally would run across someone who seemed a bit hostile, but without exception in the end the exchange

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supported him did not end with his election to office, but that he will continue to work with many of them firsthand in St. Paul to address issues.

After his first month in office, Dibble said he has been "extraordinarily busy getting up to speed" on the issues and developing relationships with other lawmakers.

"What has surprised me is the astonishing amount of paper flow around here," he said. "I've been ruthless about keeping on top of it but there is a tidal wave of paperwork."

He has been trying to read all the information sent to him from various groups outside the Capitol because he wants to learn about the variety of issues across the state.

Although he has always viewed Minnesota as home, Dibble spent much of his youth in various parts of the world. Born in New York City, he also lived in Bermuda, Italy, Portugal, Texas, and Alabama.

"I was the typical Air Force brat," he said.

Still he always looked forward to spending time in Minnesota. He graduated from Apple

turned out positive.

"I was able to engage people in a conversation, the kind I'm sure they never had before. I would say I'm gay and this is how I feel about an issue," he said. "I probably didn't change their mind but it gave them something to think about."

DISTRICT 60B

1998 population (estimate): 32,144

Largest city: Minneapolis

County: Hennepin

Location: south central Minneapolis

Top concern: "To help develop a comprehensive holistic solution to our transportation challenges on a statewide basis."

— Rep. D. Scott Dibble