

# Out front

## As House Minority Leader, Entenza hopes to draw public attention to DFL caucus goals, priorities

By JEFF JONES

Rep. Matt Entenza (DFL-St. Paul) says he's never had much luck staying out of sight. "My life's experience is when you're 6-foot-4, it's not worth pretending you can hide. People can always find you, so you'd better get up and let them know what you stand for."

As the new minority leader in the House, Entenza will have plenty of opportunity to do just that. With the smallest DFL caucus since 1969, Entenza and the rest of the DFL House leadership will be trying harder than ever to take their message straight to the public.

"The job is first and foremost to articulate the vision of the kind of Minnesota we want to have," Entenza said. He has already spoken out several times, within the first few weeks of the session, against Republican plans for resolving the projected budget shortfalls.

"The best solution to the budget crisis is to make sure we evaluate every program on its costs and benefits," Entenza said, "and to make sure that those folks who are the most vulnerable ... are treated the best in a very difficult time."

"This is the worst budget crisis since the Depression, so we're working to make the cuts we need to but (also) protect the quality of life we have in Minnesota."

The 52-member House DFL caucus elected Entenza to be its party leader last November, after the caucus lost 11 House seats in the 2002 elections. He replaces Rep. Tom Pugh (DFL-South St. Paul) who stepped down from the post after the election. Pugh had led the party in the House since 1998.

At Entenza's side will be eight assistant minority leaders, also elected by the caucus, who will play a big part in floor debate and in bringing the DFL message to communities throughout the state. They represent a deliberate diversity of gender, geography, and expertise. In addition to being equally divided by gender, the eight are equally split between representing districts in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and Greater Minnesota. "It's important that the minority leader not be the only voice," Entenza said.



House Minority Leader Matt Entenza is serving in his first term as leader for the House DFL caucus. He was first elected to the House in 1994.

Among the assistant leaders is Minority Whip Margaret Anderson Kelliher (DFL-Mpls). With a small minority, she agrees that the most important work of the party will be to take their case to voters. "Talking to the public is clearly where we'll be at," she said. "Winning votes and playing a floor strategy of catching people really isn't possible. I think there will be a much more public face to our caucus."

Kelliher calls Entenza "a bright and articulate leader who really can bring people together to see a vision and have focus."

Entenza, who was the minority whip last session, may be best known as the House sponsor of Minnesota's "Do Not Call List" legislation. An attorney with degrees from Oxford University and the University of Minnesota, Entenza first took on telemarketers as an assistant attorney general and prosecuted white-collar felonies in the Hennepin County Attorney's Office before being elected to the House in 1994.

Entenza says his experience as a criminal prosecutor should help the DFL make its case for strengthening community security and helping local police and fire departments. "We think it's a tremendous mistake that the funding for terrorism prevention has been held up for seven months," he said. "One of our first priorities will be to get that money out to law enforcement."

Assistant Minority Leader Rep. Nora Slawik (DFL-Maplewood) says Entenza is especially good at building relationships and calls him "bold, encouraging, and visionary."

"I really think he is just what (the DFL party) needs right now. He does a lot of things very well," Slawik said.

New House Majority Leader Erik Paulsen (R-Eden Prairie) was elected along with Entenza in 1994. He and Entenza roomed together during their freshman orientation session. "It never entered my mind," Paulsen said, that both of them would wind up leading their respective caucuses five terms later.

Paulsen says Entenza will be a good leader. "He is an unabashed liberal, as strong in his convictions as I am in my convictions," Paulsen said. "We get along great."

House Speaker Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon) has been pleased to work with Entenza, as well. "Matt has been extremely honorable and cordial to deal with," Sviggum said. "We've been able to talk through differences and understand each other."

Entenza, a father of three boys, isn't worried about the personal strain of a leadership position. "At one point in my life we had a 1-year-old and newborn twins. The demands of being a legislator seem easy after you've juggled three kids."

Though he is used to being busy, the frantic schedule of meetings and speaking engagements will keep him running even faster this session. "I'm going to owe (my family) a long vacation this summer," he said. 🌿

### The eight Assistant DFL Minority Leaders for 2003-2004:

- Rep. Margaret Anderson Kelliher (DFL-Mpls)
- Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar)
- Rep. Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville)
- Rep. Debra Hilstrom (DFL-Brooklyn Center)
- Rep. Mary Ellen Otremba (DFL-Long Prairie)
- Rep. Gene Pelowski, Jr. (DFL-Winona)
- Rep. Anthony Sertich (DFL-Chisholm)
- Rep. Nora Slawik (DFL-Maplewood)