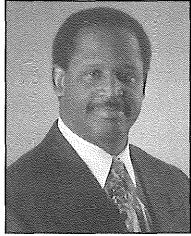


Gray aims to create jobs, foster urban development

By Grant Martin

Newly elected Rep. Gregory Gray (DFL-Mpls) said that running for the House was the furthest thing from his mind following his unsuccessful bid for the Minnesota Senate in 1996.



Rep. Gregory Gray

"I was not interested in ever running for office again," Gray said.

After that race, which maybe remembered most for the controversy involving a misplaced newspaper photo of candidate John Derus, Gray remembers feeling "burned out."

He and his wife, Renee, had handled all aspects of his Senate campaign, from newsletters to finances, and he could not fathom the idea of starting all over again.

Following his failure to gain the DFL endorsement at the Senate district convention, Gray was about to pack up his things and leave when he was approached by then-Rep. Richard Jefferson (DFL-Mpls), who served Gray's home district in the House.

"He said he really thought I had done an excellent job and that I ought to keep an open mind about politics," Gray said. "He said he thought some good things might happen in the future."

Gray headed for home, not realizing the seed had been planted for a future run at Jefferson's seat when the six-term representative retired in 1998.

"I thanked him," Gray said. "But I didn't think much of it."

Later Jefferson was influential in recruiting Gray and putting together a larger group of supporters to assist with the campaign.

"That is one of the number one reasons I was successful this time was the fact that there was a large group of real supportive folks who helped me throughout the process," he said.

Born and raised in Minneapolis, Gray worked as an internal auditor for several Twin Cities corporations before getting his law degree from Hamline University. He currently works as director of member services for the Minnesota State Bar Association, and he has been an active volunteer with several redevelopment projects in north Minneapolis.

Gray said that campaigning for the House was difficult because he considers himself an introvert, but he feels it helped him refine his legislative goals.

"I learned that people really love the district and want it to be a better place than it is today," he said. "People are entrusting you to make their vision a reality."

Gray said he will focus attention on affordable housing, education, and jobs and economic development — issues he feels are important in his urban district.

"People are very optimistic about the district," he said. "The people I talk to don't want to leave. They want to build. They want better housing stock. And they want to make sure the system of public schools is not only good, it's the best."

Gray, who takes Jefferson's place as the only African-American member of the Legislature, said diversity is essential to the political process.

"I believe very strongly in diversity," he said. "Not only is it the right thing, it provides creativity and the mix of ideas that make the process run better."

He says he's excited about the prospect of working with the new Reform Party governor this session.

"I think it is good for the process," he said. "It will keep people thinking, keep people on their feet. We won't have quite as much partisanship because people will be trying to play for (Ventura's) approval."

Gray said that when it's his turn to leave the House, he hopes that people will remember him for his integrity.

"I want to leave respected, and that may mean some people don't like you," he said. "I'd like people to say he had some core values, he was honest, he told us where he stood, and he did what he said he'd do."

District 58B

1995 population: 32,096

Largest city: Minneapolis

County: Hennepin

Location: inner city

Top concern: "I think if you were to poll the district the top concern would be economic development and jobs. The top concern I heard [when I was] door knocking is affordable housing."

—Rep. Gregory Gray

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