

Rep. Dave Gruenes . . .

IR lawmaker is key player despite minority status



Rep. Dave Gruenes (IR-St. Cloud), who was elected to the House just months after graduating from St. John's University in 1980, has spent most of his adult life in the Legislature.

That tenure will end soon, because Gruenes announced in early April that he would not seek re-election after this session, his 14th year at the Capitol.

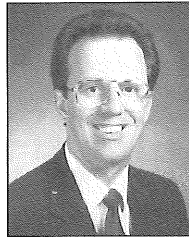
"I don't think anybody should make a career out of the Legislature," he says. Another important factor in his decision to leave was the desire to spend more time with his wife Mary and the two young daughters they are raising together in St. Cloud.

"The time demands of the job are getting tougher and tougher," he says. That reality would make it all the more difficult to spend time with his 6-year-old daughter, Jenny, and his newborn daughter, Carolyn.

For the immediate future, Gruenes, 36, said he plans to return full time to his job as a vice president at a bank in Eden Valley, a small community about 30 miles southwest of St. Cloud. He also wants to make room for a possible mid-life career change while he still has the opportunity.

Because he returned to his job as a banker when the Legislature was not in session, Gruenes says he was able to keep in touch with business world concerns. Indeed, Gruenes says many will remember him for his efforts to represent business interests, especially those of small businesses, in the Legislature.

For example, Gruenes says he had a hand



Rep. Dave Gruenes

Greatest accomplishment: Working on health-care legislation or his efforts to help senior citizens. Gruenes says that others might select those areas as being his greatest legislative accomplishments.

However, he says he will always remember the small things that he was able to do to help his constituents, and the thank you letters he has received from them over the years. "Those are the things that I will keep."

in modifying the MinnesotaCare legislation to include financial help for small businesses to buy health insurance for their employees. The 1992 legislation established a state-subsidized medical insurance program for poor and unemployed Minnesotans.

But Gruenes isn't just interested in business. He's helped vulnerable people, too.

In 1991, he sponsored the Seniors' Agenda for Independent Living (SAIL) legislation, which established a 20-year project to develop and promote alternatives to nursing homes, including in-home residential care.

Despite being in the minority party in all but two of his 14 years as a lawmaker, Gruenes said he feels he has been effective. An assistant minority leader from 1988 to 1992, Gruenes says he and other IR legislators just have to work harder at getting their bills passed. And most everybody in the House who has come to know Gruenes would agree he is a hard worker.

For example, Gruenes and six other legislators were the prime movers behind the bipartisan MinnesotaCare legislation.

"I take a fair amount of pride in putting that together," he says. Health care had the potential to be a very partisan, very divisive issue, Gruenes recalls. He and others often worked 20-hour days trying to build the bipartisan consensus that was needed to ensure that the bill could pass both houses and meet the governor's approval. "That was probably one of the most difficult things I'll ever do."

No doubt Gruenes won't miss the long work days that legislators often must endure. However, he says he will definitely miss the working relationships he has developed with many fellow legislators over the years.

"The Legislature is almost like an extended family," he says, especially for outstate legislators who must spend a lot of time away from their real families. He says he will especially remember both the hard work and the fun times with the close friends he made while at the Capitol. "Those are the things that will last."

— Tim Walker



Representatives can give out no more than 12 official congratulatory resolutions each year under a new House rule adopted April 18 by the Rules and Legislative Administration Committee.

Some lawmakers say the limit is needed because some House members send out an extraordinary number, thus overburdening House leaders, who must sign each one. Lawmakers use the resolutions to congratulate their constituents for anything from a winning little league baseball season to a one hundredth birthday.

The new rule caused Rep. LeRoy Koppen-drayer (IR-Princeton) to quip: "If we get a little short on cash, can we sell our 12?"



Karen Brunner of Apple Valley, held six-month-old Jackie Kemmic, while keeping a watchful eye on her eight home day care children during a rally in the Capitol Rotunda April 21. The rally focused on the need for improvements in compensation and working conditions for people in the early childhood field.