

New members. . .

Looking to volunteer, Hackbarth lands a House seat

Rep. Tom Hackbarth (IR-Cedar) had no intention of becoming a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives.



Rep. Tom Hackbarth

When he learned that a liberal DFLer intended to run for an open seat created by the 1992 re-districting plan, Hackbarth set out to recruit a conservative Independent-Republican as a challenger.

He planned "to be the very best volunteer that anybody ever had." But when "it came down to the wire," no candidate could be found. Hackbarth himself took up the cause.

"That's how I got started — not really intending to run for state representative at all," he recalls.

His 1992 campaign was unsuccessful, but in a 1994 rematch, he unseated Kathleen Sekhon.

Hackbarth promises to heed what he sees as the voters' message from the 1994 election: "downsize government, don't raise any taxes." He intends to "look at all areas of government" to make spending cuts.

He comes from a family of blue collar workers and currently belongs to a union. But in the past he was a business owner. The experiences allow him to "see both sides of the fence" in labor-management issues.

"I'm pretty sympathetic to some labor issues that maybe some of the more conservative Republicans in our caucus are not," he said.

Hunting and fishing issues are high on Hackbarth's legislative agenda. As a member of the Environment and Natural Resources

Committee, he'll have a voice in such issues. Like many of his constituents in northern Anoka County, he is an avid angler and hunter. The nine-point buck's head mounted on his office wall attests to his hunting skill.

The controversial treaty rights dispute between Minnesota and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe still concerns Hackbarth. A proposed settlement of the band's hunting and fishing rights under the 1837 treaty failed to gain passage in the 1993 Legislature.

Although the Mille Lacs Band recently won federal court recognition of their continuing treaty rights, Hackbarth thinks that American Indian bands in the state "should be on an equal basis with the rest of us" with regard to hunting and fishing options.

"Maybe they should have to buy a license like everyone else," he suggests. Hackbarth acknowledges that Indian treaty rights are a federal issue — something that the Legislature cannot do much about — but he supports continuing efforts by the state to litigate treaty rights cases involving the Mille Lacs Band and other Indian bands in the state.

On a separate fishing issue, Hackbarth recently authored a bill to guarantee that fishing contest participants actually receive the prizes that they win. The bill (HF384) won approval from the Environment and Natural Resource Committee and awaits consideration on the House floor.

The idea for the bill came after Hackbarth read a newspaper story about a fishing contest on Medicine Lake last year. Anglers paid a \$35 entry fee for the contest in hopes of winning big cash prizes and merchandise. But when all the fish were weighed and measured, the promoter reneged on awarding any prizes.

Concerned that fishing contest fundraisers by "little church groups and the Boy Scouts" could be harmed by the actions of disreputable promoters, Hackbarth proposes that a fishing contest promoter offering more than \$25,000 in prizes furnish the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) commissioner with a bond, insurance policy, or cash deposit equal to the total prize money.

Although the Legislature is known for its punishing schedule, Hackbarth said he used to work the evening shift before he became a lawmaker — in the parts department at Brookdale Ford. Nowadays, he is actually seeing more of his family.

Hackbarth and his wife, Mary, have three children — Jeff, 21; Gina, 19; and Tommy, 3.

While he had some doubts early this session on the ability of House members to work together, Hackbarth is beginning to find "a lot more cooperation amongst everyone," both within the IR caucus and between IRs and DFLers.

"I think we're getting along just great," he concludes. "I'm really surprised how everything is going very, very well."

— Mordecai Spektor

District 50A

Population: 32,806

Distribution: 100 percent urban

County: Anoka

Largest city: Ham Lake

Location: north metro

Unemployment rate: 5.13 percent

Residents living below poverty level: 3.47 percent

1992 presidential election results:

Bush/Quayle 29.56 percent

Clinton/Gore 38.25 percent

Perot/Stockdale 31.27 percent

Other: 0.92 percent