

For IR Phil Heir, '3' is the magic number

While some of Rudy Perpich's judicial picks might have raised eyebrows, Independent-Republican Phil Heir of Blaine jokes that one particular appointment was the best decision the former governor ever made.

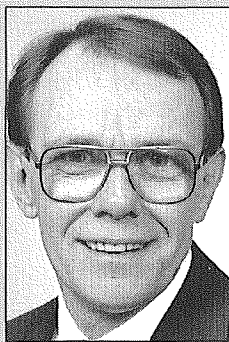
When Perpich selected former DFL Rep. Joseph Quinn of Anoka for the bench, it helped smooth Heir's way to the Capitol. Heir, who had twice unsuccessfully challenged Quinn for the District 50B seat, won a special election in February.

Heir's election may point to a mild political shift in the Twin Cities' northern suburbs, a working-class DFL stronghold. With growth in the white-collar population have come inroads for IR candidates.

When Heir and his wife moved to Blaine in 1974 to be closer to their church, he quickly became involved in local politics. "Everybody was a Democrat out there, so I went to a Democratic caucus," he recalls of his first precinct caucus. The following year, he went to the IR caucus.

"I just felt philosophically more comfortable there," he says.

Heir's involvement in the IR party increased to the point in 1988 when he became a candidate for the Legislature. "I was on the search committee [for an IR candidate to challenge Quinn], and it was the last day of filing, and we didn't have a candidate," he remembers. "And I just said the people need a choice. Without



Phil Heir

District 50B

Age: 52

Home: Blaine

Occupation: Systems analyst

District traits: 50B in Anoka County includes parts of the cities of Blaine and Coon Rapids. The district voted for Paul Wellstone over Rudy Boschwitz in the 1990 U.S. Senate election by a 51.7- to-48.3 percent margin.

any campaign, without any platform, I decided to run."

He entered the contest with a strategy: It probably would take three tries to build up name recognition and win the seat. Sure enough, his 1988 effort ended in defeat, although the 38 percent of ballots he received surprised him.

Last November, in his second try, Heir came closer, losing to Quinn by only a 55 percent to 45 percent margin.

And then the big break came. Perpich elevated Quinn to a judgeship and, running against DFLer Jim Nelson, Heir got 54 percent of the vote in a Feb. 5 special election to fill the seat.

Winning meant Heir had to take a leave of absence from his job as a systems analyst with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in St. Paul. He's been with the DNR for eight years and previously has worked for the Department of Administration and in the

banking industry.

Working for one of the state's chief environmental agencies no doubt gives Heir a better understanding of the environmental concerns of his district. The Anoka County area is rich in wetlands, he says, and he would like to see a federal wetlands laboratory established there.

Another issue important to his constituents is education.

Heir believes more local control of education is needed and that the state should pay a larger share of education costs. But he also foresees that school consolidation will be among major reforms coming in education. "We've got to believe we can do better," he says.

The freshman legislator also is concerned about property taxes and fears that big increases could hurt homeowners and businesses in his district.



Who are the lobbyists at the Capitol, and whom do they represent? Describe the work of lobbyists, both pro and con. What real influences do lobbyists and political contributions have on the legislative process? What is the significance of lobbying — paid versus grass roots?

There are lobbyists of all stripes and colors at the Legislature — so many, in fact, that they outnumber legislators by slightly more than 6 to 1. In 1990, there

were 1,237 lobbyists registered with the Minnesota Ethical Practices Board.

That's nearly twice the 690 lobbyists who were registered just 10 years ago. Do they work? Obviously many people and businesses think so; otherwise they wouldn't have paid the reported spending of \$2.1 million on lobbyists during the 12-month period ending June 30, 1990.

Although the public perception of lobbyists is somewhat shaky, they do play an integral role in the legislative process. Legislators often look to lobbyists to explain portions of a bill, whether it concerns the environment or another unit of government.

Because legislators are required to pass judgment on hundreds of topics each

session, it's nearly impossible to keep abreast of all the complex issues. That's when they sometimes turn to lobbyists — particularly ones who have provided reliable information in the past.

The rapid growth in the number of paid lobbyists in recent years has caused some legislators to question their necessity and effectiveness. Some lawmakers say it is much more effective for grass roots citizens to plead their cases with lawmakers rather than to rely on paid lobbyists.

How do they work? The term "lobbyist" stems from "lobby" — the place where these men and women originally congregated while awaiting lawmakers to emerge from the House and Senate chambers.