

# Kielkucki examines issues through a moral lens

Rep. Tony Kielkucki (R-Lester Prairie) grew up surrounded by DFL politics. It was the party of choice for the great majority of his East St. Paul neighbors, he said. His uncle, a DFL activist and union organizer, is one whom Kielkucki attributes with planting the seeds of his own interest in politics.



Rep. Tony Kielkucki

"My family members were very politically vocal and always put their convictions into practice. They were steeped in the DFL," he said.

Yet Kielkucki comes to the House of Representatives as a Republican and a conservative. "I changed parties when I felt the party left me," he said.

The decision came during a county convention in the 1980s. "I made some suggestions at the meeting, and someone responded that I sounded more like a Republican — and said that I should join them. So I did."

It wasn't the only time Kielkucki followed his convictions. He spent almost 11 years as a seminary student studying to be a priest before opting for civilian life. "I knew I'd always be committed to working with the church," he said. "But I wasn't sure about the priesthood all the way through. I kept giving it another year."

Instead, he's given 22 years to teaching, most of them at Holy Trinity High School in Winsted, Minn., where he teaches junior and senior high and chairs the religious stud-

ies program. He was attracted to the parish years ago because it offered a K-12 educational program for his children, who are now 20, 16, and 12. His children, as well as his students, are accustomed to his frequent reminders that you have to get involved if you want to make change. It's part of the lesson he teaches in a class in which social issues are examined through a moral lens. "The kids gave me a bit of a hard time. They said I should put my money where my mouth is."

Before running for the Legislature, Kielkucki was an active participant in precinct caucuses and the campaigns of others.

Today, Kielkucki has five areas where he'd most like to have an influence as a legislator, his pro-life stance being foremost.

He's also concerned about education. "I think the whole approach in the public schools needs change." Teachers no longer are free to adequately discipline students, he said. The students know they can get away with poor behavior, and the learning environment is destroyed. Kielkucki thinks the system in the United States could learn from that in Europe, where, he said, there is a greater emphasis on basics and less on extracurricular activities.

Next comes welfare reform. Kielkucki would add work requirements and time limits. "We don't want to hurt the people who need it, but we've been enabling too many for too long."

On the crime issue, Kielkucki would focus on juveniles and swift penalties for breaking the law. "There should be consequences the first time someone steals a car, not the fourth."

Finally, there's tax reform: "We're taxed too much, period."

Kielkucki added that his teaching background is helping him in his new role. "The reading, lesson plans, workshops, term papers, and learning to digest what's important — it's all the same learning model . . . Today, my job is to listen, digest, and look for ways to address needs," Kielkucki said. "In 10 years, what I hope they say about me is that I'm honest, I listen, and that I effectively work for change."

— Celeste Riley

## District 20B

**1996 population:** 33,701

**Largest city:** Norwood Young America

**Counties:** Carver, McLeod, Wright

**Location:** south-central Minnesota

**Top concern:** "The number one thing my constituents have requested is property tax relief. Local units of government are having to assume more and more responsibility for the cost of government, and everyone's taxes have increased — even while education spending hasn't. Local government is paying for more state mandates now."

—Rep. Tony Kielkucki

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Job Information .....	296-2616
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Gambling Control Division ...	639-4000
MN State Lottery Division .....	635-8100
Toll Free .....	1-800-475-4000
MN Racing Commission .....	341-7555
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Toll Free .....	1-800-657-3704
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