

Three-term legislator eyes office of state treasurer

By Matt Wetzel



When Rep. Kevin Knight (R-Bloomington) first ran for the House, he spoke in favor of term limits and vowed he would serve no more than four terms.

Now, as he eyes an opportunity to run for state treasurer, Knight has announced he will step down after just three terms. And he's already talking about what kind of state treasurer he would be.

"I'd like to take my own approach to investment issues and make that standard," Knight said. "I have a strong interest in the pension system."

The state treasurer receives and issues receipts for all payments to the treasury and controls money held in state bank accounts. The office maintains records, provides accounting services, and directs principal and interest payments on bond accounts and certificates of indebtedness.

The thing that the 40-year-old Chicago native is most proud of from his legislative career is his work to protect the state's financial well-being.

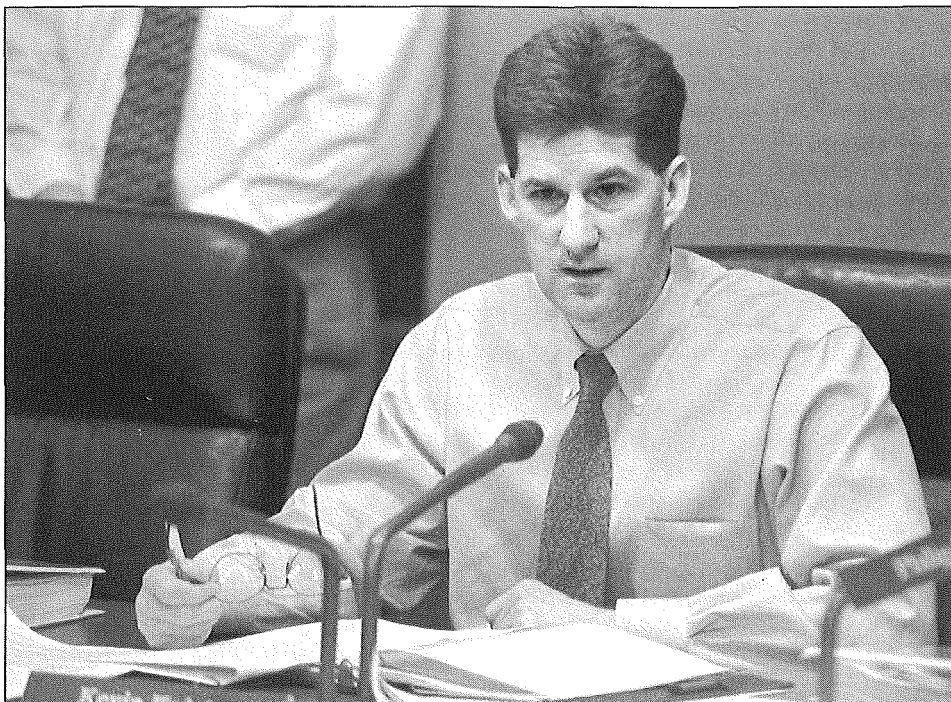
"Myself and others have brought a perspective on things relating to spending and brought a firm hand to the bottom line," he said.

In 1995, he and some other legislators, known as the "fiscal conservative caucus," worked to suggest reductions in state spending. The result was a report published in January 1996 that laid out specific recommendations for spending cuts.

"We found that \$1 billion of the spending [during that biennium] was classified as wasteful spending," he said. However, few of the group's suggestions were adopted.

Notable legislation that Knight helped sponsor includes a 1997 "corporate welfare" measure calling for the formation of a commission to study incentives given to corporations by cities to attract them and their jobs.

Knight said he was struck by the irony that in every year since 1988, the Legislature had done something to help reform welfare. But nothing had been done about "corporate welfare," which Knight defines as "the unequal distribution of money and benefits to one corporation at the expense of another corpo-



Rep. Kevin Knight, a third-term lawmaker known for his fiscal conservatism, is leaving the House to run for state treasurer.

ration, for no meaningful social purpose."

Knight made news recently by traveling to North Carolina after the failure of proposals to build a new baseball stadium here for the Minnesota Twins.

Team owner Carl Pohlad earlier signed a statement of intent to sell the team to North Carolina businessman Don Beaver, who said he intended to move the team there after the 1998 season. A vote to build a stadium here would have nullified the Beaver deal. The failure of the stadium legislation left an uncertain future for professional baseball in Minnesota.

But Knight said there didn't seem to be an enthusiastic sense of welcome for a new baseball team in North Carolina, and there was not clear support for building a new baseball stadium there. Knight concluded the Twins would not be moving there any time soon.

"There is not strong political support in Charlotte".

He added that the Twins are back where they started and that the only thing that will fix things is new ownership.

Knight, who lives in Bloomington with his

wife, Bonnie, and their three children, grew up on Chicago's south side, then the heart of the late Richard J. Daley's Democratic machine, run by the longtime mayor of that city.

Friends and acquaintances of Knight's family worked for the Daley administration, and Knight said he learned some important lessons from observing them.

"[Politics] was a people business. It was fixing potholes; it was patrolling certain blocks. It gives you an appreciation for public service," he said.

So how did a youngster who grew in a heavily Democratic area become an outspoken Republican?

"As I got older, I wanted to make my own decision on what political affiliation I'd follow," he said.

As he prepares to campaign for state treasurer, Knight said he'll miss the people in the Legislature.

"But if I'm fortunate enough to win in November, I'll still get to see them," he said. "I was fortunate being able to represent people in Bloomington."