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# Job as lobbyist saved him from early retirement

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Roger Laufenburger hadn't been a lame-duck state senator 24 hours before the offers started coming: Would you be a lobbyist for our organization?

"I hadn't considered being a lobbyist. I didn't know what to say," the 18-year DFL legislator recalled. The insurance agency he founded in Lewiston, Minn., was in the hands of his son and son-in-law. He'd become a full-time legislator, and, at 59, expected to stay on the job several more years. He didn't welcome the early retirement the voters in District 34 had thrust upon him.

Almost daily came another offer to return to the capitol as a lobbyist. "I started thinking, I'd deteriorate down in Lewiston, knowing a session

was going on up in St. Paul and I wasn't there. I thought, if I stay close to the legislative process, who knows what the future might bring? So eventually I concluded, yes, being a lobbyist for a group I believed in, that would be a career I'd like."

Laufenburger is representing the Minnesota Retail Merchants Association during the five-month 1981 session, for \$1,500 per month.

"I'm not doing this for the money; it's for the love of the Legislature," he said. "A lot of people think lobbyists make enormous sums. We don't."

Laufenburger knows his new employer well. As a state senator representing a district populated with many retail merchants he sponsored several bills on behalf of the retail association. He approaches his former colleagues to discuss retail cred-

it charges, workers' compensation, check legislation — issues he often discussed with them before as a legislator.

"My colleagues (former) are just as friendly to me as ever," he said. "I've had many invitations to visit with legislators about legislation. They call me 'senator.' They seem to respect my expertise. I maybe explain the legislation more thoroughly than I used to. That's about the only difference."

That, and the fact that he can't speak at will during committee hearings and floor debates. He walked out of a recent meeting of the Senate Employment Committee, the committee he served as chairman for four years, muttering about his inability to join the dialogue.

"Holding my tongue has been one of

my hardest jobs, especially when I hear committee witnesses testify and I know that their testimony is slightly fabricated," he said.

Laufenburger still claims the rights of a senator in one respect: He's still a member of the Legislature's select committee on transportation, and still sits at the committee's table and deliberates as a senator. His defeat did not remove him from that committee, he said. "Of course, if that committee ever considered something the retail merchants were interested in, I'd step aside."

Though being at the capitol as a lobbyist reminds him repeatedly how much he'd rather be there as a legislator, Laufenburger said he's glad he accepted the lobbying assignment. "It's not nearly as enjoyable as being in the Senate would be, but you've got to face reality."