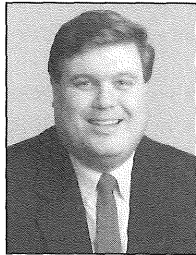


Experience pays off

Former session-only House staffer returns to Capitol in a new role as citizen legislator

By **MIKE COOK**

Rep. Eric Lipman (R-Lake Elmo) has spent a large part of the last five years at the State Capitol complex.



Rep. Eric Lipman

He began in 1996 as a session-only floating legislative assistant, before working with former U.S. Sen. Rod Grams. In June 1997, he returned to spend 18 months as a member of the House Republican research staff, and after a six-

month leave to help Department of Public Safety Commissioner Charlie Weaver in his unsuccessful bid for attorney general, Lipman was named deputy secretary of state in January 1999. He remained there until June 2000.

From those humbler beginnings, Lipman has ascended to a seat in the House chambers.

He says he wants legislative employees to know that if they're in the job for the experience, it'll be worth it in the long run.

"There is an open path to folks who are willing to train and work hard, stay late, volunteer and help," he said while sitting at his desk on the House floor waiting for a recent floor session to begin. One of Lipman's committee assignments is the House Capital Investment Committee. "That's a neat homecoming, as I was previously a staff person (for that committee)," he said of his activities during the 1998 session.

Among the communities served by District 56B are Lake Elmo, Woodbury, Afton, Oakdale, and Denmark Township. Lipman describes his district as a mix of bedroom communities and places where farmers still work and live off the land. "That is something we want to preserve."

Sixty percent of all people in the district have a college degree or better, Lipman said. But he is troubled that Washington County has one of the largest percentages of two-income families of any county in the nation.

"From my own perspective that is because we take too much out of the family budget that both spouses are in the workplace to make ends meet," he said.

One of Lipman's primary goals in the 2001 session is reducing taxation on citizens. His goal is to make what he calls the traditional, single-income family an option for more couples.

Speaking from personal experience, Lipman and his wife, Kimberly, would like to be able to have one of them stay at home to care for their 18-month-old daughter Jenna.

"If we had the choice we would rather have

power over local comprehensive plans," Lipman said. He introduced a bill earlier this month that would limit that power. While not a full abolition of the Met Council, it would permit more joint powers agreements and allow local governments a greater role in regional planning decisions.

As for schooling, he would like to see all districts treated the same for purposes of the state formula, unlike the 2000 session when he said some legislators were willing to "monkey" with the student aid formula to benefit their district.

"The effect of favoring some districts over others will short growing districts like mine. We should treat every child the same," he said. "Maintaining a different local formula will allow variations as needs may be."

An attorney by profession, Lipman believes his experience will be an asset in the lawmaking process.

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a simpler lifestyle and be able to spend more time with Jenna," he said. "Frankly too many of my neighbors and people I represent don't feel that is a legitimate option for them.

"My wife is an enormously capable person, who has a great career with many possibilities, but we're trying to work it where she can stay home because that's where her priorities are. It's not about a sexist view of who should stay home, it's giving people the choices of what to do."

In addition to tax cuts and lowering spending, Lipman's other priorities are strengthening schools by making sure they have a stable funding formula to meet their needs, and letting local communities have more control in planning decisions.

Regarding the latter, Lipman, who served on the Lake Elmo Planning Commission for 19 months, says the Metropolitan Council has "too great a role in planning decisions for communities like ours.

"They have a dramatic review and veto

"I hope it makes me interested in how detailed draftsmanship is important — that words really do matter," he said referring to bills and the question of legislative intent. "Attorneys fight, squabble, argue and negotiate over the meaning of words. If we spend more time and care in our writing up front, perhaps we'd have less arduous work later."

DISTRICT 56B

1998 population (estimate): 45,002

Largest city: Woodbury

County: Washington

Location: south and east of St. Paul

Top concern: "I'd be interested in reducing income tax."

— Rep. Eric Lipman