

positive signs that the state is strengthening its commitment to education.

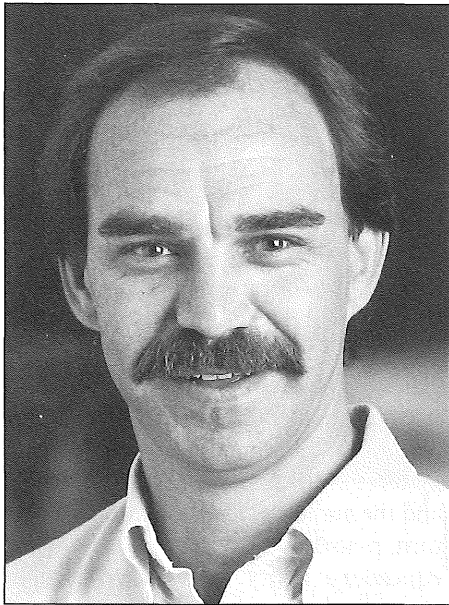
Twenty years of House service is not without its disappointments, however. Nelson said that the resistance of some teachers' unions to effective change has been a frustrating stumbling block.

"We ought to have more quality than what we have, and the resistance of some within the system itself to follow through on substantive and creative change has forced us to create alternatives," he said.

Nelson also expressed frustration with the legislative process itself, stating that "we are not always governed by quality, but too much by partisan politics."

"I remain strong with conviction that our public systems and services are not serving our citizens as well as they should be," he said, adding that he hopes he can make government more responsive by acting outside the government structure itself.

—Steve Knutson



Paul Ogren

The conference committee was in its third day and Rep. Paul Ogren (DFL-Aitkin) was chairing a taxes meeting for possibly the last time.

Sen. Doug Johnson (DFL-Cook), who has seen many House tax chairs come and go said, "I would remind conferees that the chair is a lame duck."

The room erupted in laughter.

While the temptation for some representatives might be to relax during their final year, Ogren has remained at the forefront of some of this session's

most controversial issues.

He has been the driving force behind HealthRight, the proposal that could change the face of health care in Minnesota and the nation by ensuring access to health care. And he has once again co-chaired the taxes conference committee, which is always one of the most important jobs at the Legislature.

But he is quick to give credit where it is due.

"The Minnesota Nurses Association has pushed health care reform legislation in a wholly selfless fashion since 1987," said Ogren.

Whatever their political persuasion, members from both sides of the aisle say they'll miss Ogren's hard-charging presence.

Never shy about letting his views be known, Ogren is usually found in the middle of the action. While he may relish the individual battles, he is not impressed with the process. He said 12 years in the Legislature has made him very cynical.

"I have found that the voice of the people is a distant whisper in the halls of government," he said.

He doesn't intend to become an entrenched figure in government, telling members at a recent hearing that he will once again enjoy "railing at the system from the outside."

But have the halls of government seen the last of Paul Ogren? Don't bet on it.

During a recent committee meeting — where his HealthRight bill endured a difficult grilling — Ogren said, "I would have to be crazy" to seek higher office.

He is, however, frequently mentioned as a candidate for higher office.

—Bob DeBoer



Linda Runbeck

Linda Runbeck, the House Independent-Republican from Circle Pines, believes the lagging economy could in fact be used to enliven Minnesota's democratic process.

The belt-tightening and consequent scrutiny of government spending, said Runbeck, should inspire taxpayers to learn what government programs do.

"Without that knowledge," Runbeck recently wrote her constituents in a newspaper column, "we become lazy armchair quarterbacks calling out cheap shots from the sidelines."

"My hot button is citizen access," Runbeck said, when asked about her priorities as a representative for District 52A, most of which lies in Anoka County north of Minneapolis.

She believes citizens should "get back into the process." Among her proposals for the 1991 session was a bill permitting citizens to form "budget review panels" in city and county government to work "in open dialogue" with local government officials.

Runbeck is serving her fourth year in the House this session. She will be giving up her House seat to campaign for the Senate seat now held by Sen. Fritz Knaak (IR-White Bear Lake), who is retiring from the Senate.

Runbeck, a former Circle Pines city councilwoman, helped other candidates run for the House seat six times before she decided to run for the office herself. She won the House seat in a special election in 1989.