

Retiring member to head ag utility research institute

By Matt Wetzel



Rep. Edgar Olson (DFL-Fosston) has been in the House since 1985, and he now believes it's time to move on.

"I've learned about the process," he said. "You begin to think maybe you need somebody with a fresh sense of things, even though you're probably more knowledgeable than you were when you started."

Olson, 60, was born and raised in Fosston, in the Red River Valley, where he owns a 1,000-acre farm, raising potatoes, barley, wheat, and livestock.

He has announced he will not run for re-election this fall and that he will become executive director for the Agricultural Utility Research Institute in Crookston.

"I came here in the middle of the farm crisis [of the mid-1980s] and we did a good job with the interest buy-down and mediation programs. Those were things that were priorities then," he said.

Olson cited the lack of time for his children and his own pursuits as factors in his decision not to run again.

Besides, he said, it wasn't necessarily his idea to run for state Legislature in the first place.

"People came to me and wanted me to run," he said. "I was probably the last of eight candidates that entered."

Olson had farmed and worked for the agricultural industry as president of the American Sheep Council before he was elected in November 1984.

Over the years, Olson has worked on House committees focusing on taxes, education, transportation, and local government concerns.

He currently chairs the Property Tax and Tax Increment Finance Division of the House



Rep. Edgar Olson was first elected to the House in 1984. He will not seek re-election this fall.

Taxes Committee, which has carried a heavy workload in the days of budget surpluses and tax-cut proposals.

He also served as chair of the House Ethics Committee earlier in his legislative career.

Olson's wife, Phyllis, died seven years ago. He has two grown children, one living in New York and the other in Eden Prairie. He said he wants to see more of them in his post-legislative life.

"I'm like all the goal-dedicated people that we've had here. It seems that you're carving a big chunk of your life in here and it gets to the point where it's all-consuming," he said. "Between the sessions and everything that goes on, every time you try to plan things you've got a conflict."

Olson said he is going to miss the Legislature and the friends he has made in the House.


"I look forward to visiting them and seeing them on a personal basis," he said, adding that he counts all legislators as friends.

"If there's anything that deals with agricultural issues I'll remain in close contact," he said.

Still, Olson acknowledged that he will miss some aspects of life as a legislator.

"There are a lot of people that you have a common bond with, especially people in the agricultural areas," he said.

And that's his first love, farming. He said he has tried to devote his legislative career to serving his constituents and other rural Minnesotans and to helping farmers and farm communities.

"I've been able to support the people and their interests," Olson said. 

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