

Taking the next step

After five terms, Orfield leaves House to run for Senate seat

By JON FURE

Rep. Myron Orfield (DFL-Mpls) may be leaving the House this session after serving 10 years, but he's not leaving the political arena. Orfield will be running for the Senate seat that is held by Sen. Allan Spear (DFL-Mpls), who is retiring.

Though he's moving on, Orfield, 38, said it has been a privilege to serve in the House, and running for the Senate would be a new challenge.

"The House is a very open and democratic institution," he said. "Everyone gets to speak, and you learn about different people in the state. It teaches you about the basic elements of human nature with a lot of adrenaline. You get a lot of experience about life in a big hurry."

Orfield is an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota Law School, where he teaches students about criminal procedure and legislative process. He also works with the Metropolitan Area Research Corporation.

Before he was elected to the House in 1990, Orfield had worked for one of his mentors, former Minneapolis Mayor Don Fraser.

Orfield said he was also influenced by members of his own family. When he was growing up, his older brothers and sisters were active in the civil rights movement, and many family discussions revolved around those kinds of issues.

"We talked more about public issues than politics around the dinner table," he said.

Orfield has lived in southwest Minneapolis most of his life, and many of his siblings, parents, and other extended family members still live in that area. He said he is the fourth generation of his family to live in the district, and his son is the fifth.

The only times he has lived outside of Minneapolis were when he earned his law degree from the University of Chicago and when he studied American history at Princeton University.

Orfield said his biggest accomplishments in the House have been related to regional government issues, such as affordable housing and land-use planning. He and other lawmakers from the Minneapolis and St. Paul and inner-ring suburbs formed a coalition, which he said improved the school-equity formula and helped

pass many bills regarding affordable housing and tax sharing.

His book, *Metropolitics*, published in 1997, advocates widespread use of such coalitions, saying it's the only way to properly conduct

regional and urban planning. The book suggests such coalitions help make the region more prosperous and stable.

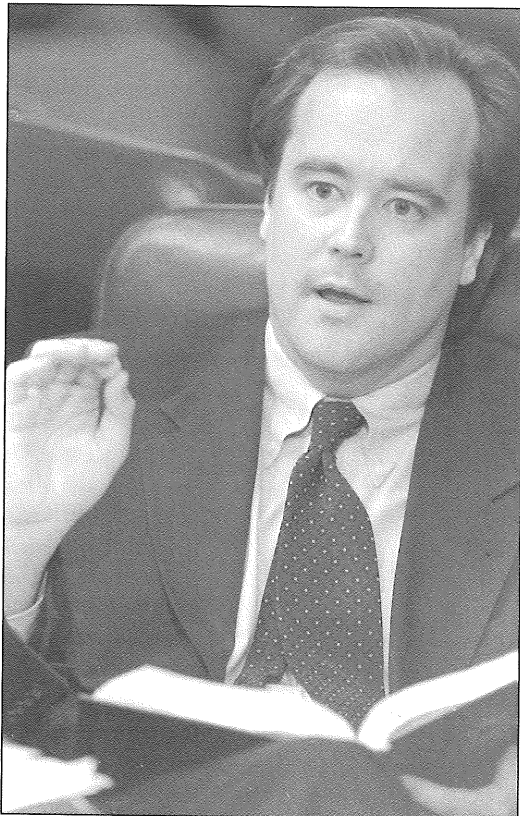
The book, which is just one of many regional planning concepts Orfield advocates, led to an appearance on the television program "Nightline" that same year.

Orfield sponsored the Metropolitan Reorganization Act of 1994, which brought the Metropolitan Transit Commission, the Regional Transit Board, and the Metropolitan Waste Control Commission under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council. He also helped develop the Livable Communities Act of 1995, which is designed to avoid having poverty and crime concentrated in certain areas.

"It's a question of fairness between cities and older suburbs versus newer suburbs," he said. "And most cities agree — really only the most affluent suburbs are opposed to affordable housing and tax sharing."

"An argument can be made that it's in everyone's best interest, but I haven't persuaded everyone yet," he said.

Also in 1997, Orfield sponsored a bill that would have made Met Council board members elected instead of appointed, but it was vetoed by Gov. Arne Carlson. ❁



STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Myron Orfield
DFL

District 60B - Minneapolis

Terms: 5

Career notes: Orfield's chief accomplishments in the House have been related to regional government issues, such as affordable housing and land-use planning.