

Paymar brings urban voice to help all Minnesotans

It's no coincidence that the office of Rep. Michael Paymar (DFL-St. Paul) belonged to his predecessor, fellow DFLer and District 64B Rep. Howard Orenstein.



Rep. Michael Paymar

"I asked for it. I felt it would be good karma," Paymar said. That's because Orenstein not only served as co-chair of Paymar's campaign committee, he left office well-liked after a decade of service. "If, after I've served in office, people talk about me the way I heard them talk about Howard, I'll be very happy."

While the Capitol hallways are new to Paymar, he is no stranger to elective politics. He served eight years as a member of Duluth's city council, including a term as president, which gives him a fairly good handle on the legislative process, he said. Still, he's struck by the difference in mass between state and city governing bodies.

"In Duluth, I was one of nine members. Now I'm one of 134, plus the Senate and all the departments and commissions. The state is huge. It's an awesome responsibility."

Having grown up in the Duluth area and living now in St. Paul, Paymar said he has a broad perspective on state policy issues. His family background has made him sensitive to even larger themes.

"My mother did a lot to help me see the impact of racism and discrimination. She was very angry about racism, and that strongly influenced who I am. It made me determined to do my part to stop injustice," he said.

Part of his mother's perspective came from

losing family members to the Holocaust. "I was born eight years after [World War II] ended. I was indoctrinated on the Holocaust," Paymar said. It led to civic activism and the peace and civil rights movements while still in his teens, starting with a memorial march after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Neighborhood activism and work on environmental causes would follow.

Paymar moved to St. Paul in 1989 when his wife, Susan Askelin, took a job in Dakota County. Their children, Jason, 28, and Nicole, 22, also live and work in the Twin Cities. Paymar said the peace and stability of the Highland Park and Macalester-Groveland neighborhoods that he represents do not insulate him from concern about the city's overall health. From his seat on the Judiciary Committee, Paymar is in a position to help.

"I have a 15-year history in working against domestic violence. I hope to influence the way we approach crime prevention. It's a critical issue in St. Paul," Paymar said.

Paymar has written two books: *Violent No More: Helping Men End Domestic Abuse*, a self-help book for violent and abusive men who want to change their behavior; and *Education Groups for Men Who Batter: The Duluth Model*, an academic book for practitioners who work with men who are violent. The model is being used by over 300 programs throughout the country, Paymar said.

Property tax reform is another of his other priorities.

"One thing I heard over and over during the campaign is frustration that reform gets discussed, argued over, and debated, but nothing ever happens." He worries that the heavy tax burden will drive people from St.

Paul and into the suburbs, only worsening urban sprawl — another issue of concern to him. He said the property tax code should be simplified so that people can better judge whether it's fair. He also believes that there is widespread, bipartisan support for the state to assume a greater portion of public education funding, which would reduce the amount that comes from property taxes.

Paymar said he'd fight urban sprawl by strengthening the authority of the Metropolitan Council and having its members be elected, rather than appointed. Addressing urban concerns — across party lines — can benefit all Minnesotans, he said.

"This is a pivotal time for the metro area, in which we have to address the social problems creeping into the entire state. There will be less rancor and political bickering between the parties, and more cooperation this session. All of us need to be sympathetic to the needs of legislators throughout the state."

— Celeste Riley

District 64B

1996 population: 32,468

Largest city: St. Paul

County: Ramsey

Location: inner city

Top concern: "All neighborhoods need to work together for stronger community. It's important to expand the tax base, increase the quality of the schools, assure safe streets, and provide opportunities for our children. I'm going to do what I can to assure that the state is furthering those goals."

— Rep. Michael Paymar

Where to find information

Chief Clerk's Office

211 State Capitol (612) 296-2314

This office provides copies of bills at no charge, all agendas for House sessions, and the Journal of the House.

House Index Department

211 State Capitol (612) 296-6646

The House Index Department, a part of the Chief Clerk's Office, has a computerized index available for public use. House Index

lists bills by committee, topic, author, file number, and other categories. The office can also give you the current status of legislation.

House Television Services

216C State Capitol (612) 297-1338

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KTCI-TV, Channel 17. Beginning in mid-March 1997, the House will broadcast via satellite statewide. Outstate residents should check with local cable operators for time and channel information or the office's Web site at: <http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/htv/htv.ssi>

All televised floor sessions and committee hearings are close-captioned for people with hearing impairments.