

Perlt runs on shoe leather in his race for the House

To say that Rep. Walt Perlt (DFL-Woodbury) is an enthusiastic man is an understatement. He has hit the ground running in his new job representing St. Paul's eastern suburbs, and already talks about campaigning for the seat again.



Rep. Walt Perlt

"I'm having the time of my life," said Perlt, who, at 65, is the most senior of the newly elected House members. He counts as one of his campaign highlights

"making so many new friends."

Perlt's district (57A) spans Oakdale, Maplewood, and western Woodbury, which doubled in size during the 1980s and is Minnesota's ninth fastest growing city. He describes his district as "very diverse."

Getting elected to the House was not on Perlt's "To Do" list even a year ago. Before retiring in 1990, he was the state's chief of enforcement for liquor control, and worked in the Department of Public Safety for 38 years. He and his wife, Dodie, were enjoying retirement and planning a six-week fishing trip to British Columbia.

Then, just three days before the DFL district convention, a neighbor urged him to run for the House seat.

As a newcomer to the political arena, Perlt won the party's endorsement on the seventh ballot.

"I got into it accidentally, but I took the campaign seriously," Perlt said of his subsequent election. "I door knocked and went back again a second time. My opponent outspent me about four-to-one, but he ran a media campaign, and I ran a shoe leather campaign."

Friends and co-workers say Perlt is forthright, upbeat, and energetic. "He pretty much knows everybody in the world," said Tom Leigh, an enforcement agent who worked under Perlt. He described his former boss as "always in a great mood — always happy and positive."

Minnesotans may find something reminiscent about Perlt's strong, earthy voice when they hear him speak on the House floor. His uncle, Jule Perlt, was the voice of the Golden Gophers for 62 years before he died last summer.

Perlt is fond of hunting and fishing, and is quick to share tips for smoking the catch, including salmon, trout, and venison. Friends say his reputation for making "great" barbecue ribs is well deserved.

"I've never been a shrinking violet," said Perlt, explaining his love for campaigning. "I enjoyed talking to thousands of people. They want to see you eyeball to eyeball. They want to know whether you're genuine, or promising the moon."

Perlt said that while his constituents told him they want to maintain adequate funding for education, taxes remain a large concern.

He is aware that his votes will be watched by the people in his district.

"They will have to put a .357 Magnum to my head to raise [taxes]," said Perlt. "My goal is to not raise taxes and keep the state operating. That's what my constituents have told me. Don't raise taxes, or don't come back. I take that very seriously."

—Joyce Peterson

District 57A

Population: 31,241
 Distribution: 99.9 percent of residents live in urban areas, 0.1 percent rural.
 Counties: Ramsey, Washington
 Largest city: Woodbury
 Location: east Metro
 1992 presidential election results:
 Clinton/Gore: 45.1 percent
 Bush/Quayle: 30 percent
 Perot/Stockdale: 24.3 percent
 Other: 0.6 percent

Life at Capitol far cry from Molnau's days on farm

Like her parents before her, Rep. Carol Molnau (IR-Chaska) runs a family farm. On a 430-acre plot in northern Chaska, she and her husband grow corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and tend 140 head of dairy and beef cattle.



Rep. Carol Molnau

While on the farm, Molnau said she never dreamed of becoming a member of the Minnesota Legislature. "But I've always been involved in my community and my business and I think that probably evolved into my involvement here," she said.

Nevertheless, Molnau is no political neophyte. She has been involved in IR party politics for several years and has spent the last four years on the Chaska City Council. She said that lifelong volunteer duties, including community education projects and the 4-H Club, have kept her in touch with local issues.

In ousting the DFL incumbent in District 35A (Larry Bodahl), Molnau credits her community involvement, conservative philosophy, and accessibility to the voters for her 1992 campaign victory.

But she said it was the hard work of her family that made it all possible. "Family was the most

important element in running for this office," she said. Molnau said her husband and three daughters were more than willing to pitch in and help so she could devote more time to campaigning and being a House member.

"When one of us has been involved in something, the rest of us kind of pick up the slack," she said.

Molnau's district is economically diverse, with urban industrial sections to the east and rural sections in the northern and southern ends of the district.

While this creates divergent concerns that may prove difficult to bridge, Molnau said she heard a common theme while on the campaign trail: "Basically, people weren't happy with government."

Many voters felt overtaxed while still expressing the desire for higher quality government services.

"One of the things I heard over and over again is [that] they couldn't afford any more taxes, but were concerned for schools. The priority still is for K-12 education," Molnau said, adding that improving the state's infrastructure was also a concern.

Prompted by her district's frustrations, Molnau is most interested in streamlining government to reduce public spending without com-

promising services.

"I would like to see some down-sizing of government in the form of efficiency," she said. Molnau would prefer state employees to target waste. "Letting them do it gives them some control" along with a feeling of accomplishment, she said.

Life at the Capitol is a far cry from her days on the farm, and Molnau is preparing herself for the tough calls that loom ahead. She said she wants to be the kind of legislator "where you listen to your constituency, and you can still make decisions here [in St. Paul] that you can go home and feel right about."

—Adam Samaha

District 35A

Population: 32,924
 Distribution: 54.2 percent of residents live in urban areas, 45.8 percent rural.
 Counties: Carver, Le Sueur, Scott, Sibley
 Largest city: Chaska
 Location: southwest Metro
 1992 presidential election results:
 Bush/Quayle: 34.8 percent
 Clinton/Gore: 34.2 percent
 Perot/Stockdale: 30.6 percent
 Other: 0.4 percent