

Rep. Peter Rodosovich . . .

Looks to new career after lifetime of accomplishments



Rep. Peter Rodosovich (DFL-Faribault) suspects DFL party leaders in his home district didn't think he had a chance to win Faribault's state legislative seat 12 years ago, but they endorsed him anyway.

As a University of Minnesota political science student, Rodosovich had spent a lot of time learning his way around the legislative process. His party counted that as a plus — even if he was just 22 years old.

Rodosovich surprised them by winning the seat from a two-term incumbent. His immediate ease among fellow legislators and his effective leadership once at the Capitol pleased constituents, who have voted him back six times.

But Rodosovich, 34, won't be back next year. He announced in October that he won't seek re-election.

"I'm pretty much tired out. It's time for a break," said Rodosovich, who looks forward to family holidays and quiet time alone instead of a re-election campaign.

Which is another reason he won't be back. Campaigns don't take the same tone they did when he mounted his first in 1982.

The ugliness of campaigns and their personal nature is different from what they used to be, Rodosovich said. "They used to be focused on voting records and party platforms and now it's down to a negative campaign style. People are challenged on beliefs, moral foundations, and their being as a person, not the issues," he said.

Rodosovich may return full time to his job



Rep. Peter Rodosovich

Greatest accomplishment: Communicating with the people who elected him.

Rodosovich labeled his greatest accomplishment throughout his 12 years in office as simply listening and responding to constituents.

"There's no single greatness," he said. "Communicating with them is what I'm proudest of."

He advises his successor to: "Listen to your constituents. Don't forget who elected you . . . be loyal first to your district constituents. . . ."

as Minneapolis YMCA executive director, a post he's held since 1989, but he also is considering other career options. Picking up a master's degree in public affairs or public policy may be in the offing, he said. If he does return to school, he'll enroll in a "mid-career" program, the kind that targets people interested in a career change.

Rodosovich will leave behind his fair share of accomplishments. In 1988, he helped piece together an all-important compromise that brought a state prison to Faribault to replace the Faribault Regional Center, which is still in the process of being "downsized."

In 1992, he chaired the House Redistricting Committee, which was charged with redrawing the state's legislative and congressional district boundary lines following the 1990 U.S. Census.

He also has chaired the Health and Human Services Committee and is the current chair of the Higher Education Finance Division of the Education Committee.

Add to that other tasks such as overseeing

the remodeling of the House chamber in 1989-90, spearheading the orientation program for new House members, and serving as the unofficial Capitol historian, and it becomes clear that Rodosovich's presence will be missed.

But he said his fondest memories are of his work on the Hunger Reduction Act of 1987, which ensured hungry Minnesotans access to congregate meals and food distribution programs. Though he was not the chief author of the measure, some of his proposals were included in the final bill.

The mild-mannered Rodosovich has seen a few changes — not all for the better — in the Legislature since his arrival.

"We've become too focused on what people perceive the Legislature to be rather than on what it should be. We've become more focused on public opinion polling. Leading by polls isn't true leadership," he said.

—Jean M. Thilmany

In recent years, Minnesota lawmakers have debated whether Minnesota parents should receive state vouchers so their children can attend either public or private schools.

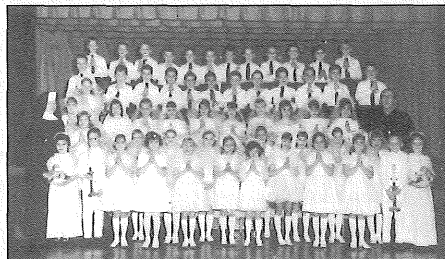
The debate, however, is more than 140 years old.

The fourth Territorial Legislature, convening in a two-story brick building in downtown St. Paul in 1853, was asked to deal with the question.

Bishop Joseph Cretin of St. Paul had petitioned the Legislature asking that state dollars allocated to the "common school fund" be made available to fund religious schools.

Rep. W.P. Murray of St. Paul, speaking on behalf of a majority of committee

It's a fact!



Second graders at Most Holy Trinity Catholic School in St. Louis Park prepare for their first communion. The year is 1966.

members assigned to discuss the petition, found that the "petitioners have just grounds of complaint, and that the present school law is defective. . . ."

The committee then introduced a bill to allow "all communities of any denomination, willing to have a school of their own, in which religious instruction will be taught as well as other branches of education, be authorized to do so, and their schools shall be entitled to all the benefits accruing to district schools."

To qualify for state funds, any religious school needed to have at least 25 students.

But after considerable discussion, the proposal was soundly defeated. With only 18 members in the Territorial House, five members voted in favor of the bill; 12 voted against.