

Taking a bite out of crime

Skoglund hopes to carry on his advocacy for the safety of state residents in the Senate chamber

By LISA HILTON

Keeping Minnesotans safe is how Rep. Wes Skoglund (DFL-Mpls) sums up his service as a representative of the people of south Minneapolis for the last 26 years.

Now he hopes to continue that mission as a member of the Senate.

Skoglund said his decision to leave the House and run for the Senate was in part due to the fact that the redistricting plan placed him and Rep. Jean Wagenius (DFL-Mpls) in the same district.

But it was also time for a change, he said.

"I happen to like the House. I'm very comfortable here. I know how it works, and I enjoy

mammograms, tightened the laws regarding career criminals and school attendance, and banned smoking in all state buildings.

For six years, Skoglund served as chair of the House Judiciary Finance Committee, which oversees the state's civil and criminal justice systems. Since Republicans gained control of the House in 1998, Skoglund has served as the DFL lead for the Crime Prevention Committee. He also currently serves on the House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law committees.

Over the years, he has also served on numerous committees such as ways and means, taxes, environment and natural resources, and K-12 education finance.

Rep. Dave Bishop (R-Rochester) has worked closely with Skoglund to pass several sex offender laws, including one requiring community notification when a Level 3 sex offender moves into a neighborhood.

"There were at least eight years where we acted as partners on sex offender legislation," he said. "That's an unusual situation where a chair of a committee partners with a minority member."

Skoglund was a good chairman who kept on top of the issues, Bishop said. "He was very much engaged. He did a lot of research on issues and was very much an active chairman."

Bishop said House members will remember Skoglund as a vigorous challenger of policy and procedure from the minority side. "He was often the first to challenge on points of order."

As two recent examples of his policy battles, Skoglund fought against a bill during the 2001 session that would have changed the procedure for Minnesotans trying to obtain a concealed weapon permit. This session he was also

a leading opponent of allowing the sale of fireworks in the state.

Skoglund, 56, was first elected to the House in 1974 at age 29, but his interest in politics started at a much younger age.

"I've been around public policy all my life," he said. "I remember watching United States conventions from the time I was 7 years old."

The interest in public affairs continued while he studied psychology at the University of Minnesota.

"That's one thing I enjoyed about the U," he said. "There was always some speaker somewhere talking about something somewhere on campus."


After working at Control Data for 24 years, he now works as a substitute teacher for children with special needs, including autism, in the Hennepin County area.

The school district was looking for substitutes, and especially looking for people to work with special needs youth, Skoglund said.

"In the first part of my adult life I volunteered in a program like that, so I had some experience dealing with (cognitively) impaired kids and adults," he said.

Now in his 13th non-consecutive term, Skoglund said the House has become more partisan than when he started.

"Too many of the new members have surrendered their power to the leadership of the majority party," he said. "They have denied themselves the right to be as complete and full a member as I was when I began serving in the Legislature."

When asked for his advice to new representatives, Skoglund said he would encourage them to be themselves and not turn over their votes to a party or special interest. "Remember your constituency. And your constituency is not the lobbyists who stand out in the hall." 

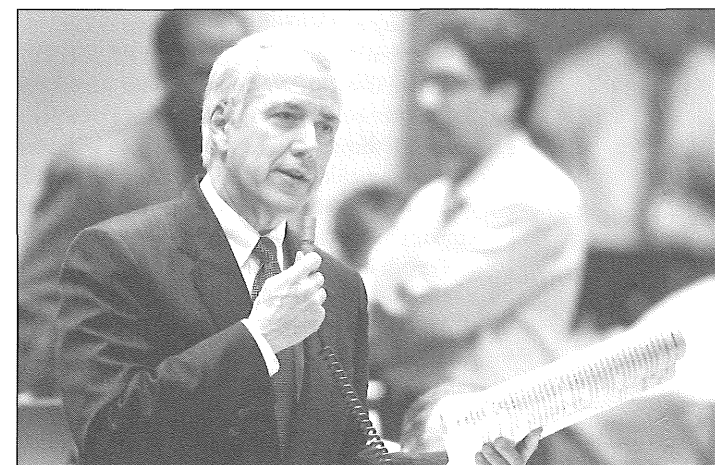


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

Rep. Wes Skoglund, who has served 13 non-consecutive terms in the House, will run for the Senate this fall.

the personalities," he said. "But it's time to take on a new challenge."

With more than 200 laws associated with his name, Skoglund has sponsored measures that crack down on sexual criminals, tighten gun control laws, and reorganized the juvenile justice system.

Among his accomplishments, Skoglund said he helped his district by improving the criminal justice system, putting more police on the streets and more public prosecutors and defenders in courtrooms.

Other laws Skoglund sponsored guaranteed that medical insurance providers cover

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Wes Skoglund

DFL

District 62B — Minneapolis

Terms: 13 (non-consecutive)

Career notes: Skoglund has sponsored measures to reorganize the juvenile justice system and crack down on sexual criminals, including one requiring community notification if a level 3 sex offender moves into a neighborhood.