Rep. Doug Swenson . . .

## New judge leaves behind family ties in Legislature

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By Nick Healy



Rep. Doug Swenson's departure from the House ends the second longest run in a storied family history in the Minnesota Legislature. Swenson was one of six members

of the same family tree to serve in the Legislature over the course of more than 100 years. Earlier this month, the Forest Lake Republican left the House to begin a new job on the bench in the 10th Judicial District Court in Pine City, Minn.

The Legislature will not be Swenson-less, however, as Swenson leaves behind his brother, Howard, a second-term Republican House member from Nicollet, Minn.

When Doug Swenson was first elected to the House in 1986, he continued a family tradition that began when his great-grandfather, Swen Swenson, was elected to the House in 1886.

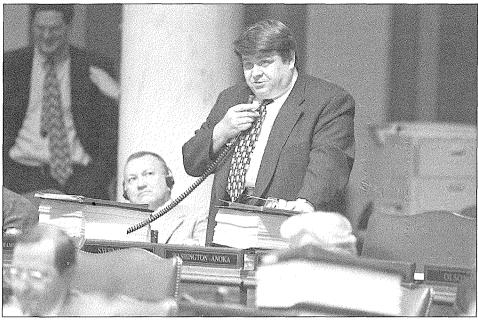
Swen served in the House with his brother, Lars. Swen's sons, Carl and Oscar, took up where their father left off when both were elected to the Legislature during the early 1900s. Oscar was perhaps the most well-known of the group, serving in the House from 1913 to 1932, including a stint as speaker, and serving in the Senate from 1937 to 1950. He was the grandfather of Doug and Howard.

"I've enjoyed the chance to serve because of that heritage, and it's been especially nice to serve with my brother," Doug Swenson said. "Howard's 15 years older than I am, and this was the first time I've ever had seniority over him."

Outside of the House, Swenson has worked as a senior assistant Washington County attorney since 1975. Combine that with his noted legislative work on public safety issues and it is apparent why Gov. Arne Carlson selected Swenson for the judicial position.

"Swenson possesses a unique combination of experience prosecuting criminal cases and crafting legislation that seeks to find solutions to the problems facing the court system today," Carlson said when the appointment was announced.

Swenson listed fiscal responsibility, education, and public safety among his chief concerns as a lawmaker, and he left his mark as the author of laws that toughened penalties for driving while intoxicated and clamped down on underage drinkers.



Rep. Doug Swenson, a leader in efforts to stiffen Minnesota's DWI laws, left the House to accept an appointment to the District Court bench.

He led successful efforts to require repeat DWI offenders to forfeit their vehicles and to create a "not-a-drop" standard for underage drivers. Swenson also backed a 1997 effort to lower the threshold for legal drunkenness to 0.08 percent blood-alcohol content. While that proposal did not pass, Swenson said he believes the stage is set for the lower standard to become law in the future.

"Doug has made a tremendous impact on the lives of all Minnesotans through his work on strengthening Minnesota's DWI laws," said House Minority Leader Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon). "He has been a leader in securing safe streets, schools, and communities for all Minnesota families."

Swenson served on the House Judiciary Committee, and he was the lead Republican on the Judiciary Finance Division. His work on those panels drew respect from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.

"He was a very valuable member of the committee, and I think he's an excellent appointment," said Rep. Wes Skoglund (DFL-Mpls), who chairs the Judiciary Committee. "He'll do a good job as a judge, and the people of the state of Minnesota are well served by his appointment."

Rep. Harry Mares (R-White Bear Lake), whose desk was next to Swenson's in the House

chamber and whose district borders Swenson's, said he will miss their conversations about the issues of the day.

"I consider him a person of integrity," Mares said. "He did what was right, not always what was popular. He was a hard-working, fairminded legislator."

Swenson lists the fact that he never had the opportunity to serve in the majority caucus as his only regret from his days as a lawmaker. Republicans last held a controlling majority in the House the year before Swenson arrived. Still, Swenson said he will draw satisfaction from his work on crime and public safety issues.

"I've appreciated the opportunity that my constituents have given me to serve in the Legislature, and I feel that I have been able to contribute on a variety of public policy issues in a positive way," Swenson said. "I will miss the opportunity to advocate for change that I believe will improve the lives of Minnesotans, but I am excited about the chance to serve in another way that is also very important."



