

As a legislator, Runbeck has sought legislation for small business tax relief, legislative term limits, limited school-night work hours for students, campaign finance reform, and a reduction in the House budget.

She also has authored several bills to improve living conditions for mobile home residents, whose relationship with mobile park owners, she said, is often "unfair and inequitable." Nine mobile home parks are in her district.

But many of her IR measures have failed to get the required votes in the House. "As a member of the minority party, we have to take our satisfaction in what we can do for our constituents," she said. She said she works "not just to pacify those needs but to help constituents know more about the process so they have tools" to find answers.

The Senate district Runbeck will run in includes the communities of Arden Hills, Circle Pines, North Oaks, and Shoreview. "It is pure Republican — as Republican a district as you can find in Minnesota," she said.

Runbeck believes the Senate "would be a wonderful opportunity to speak the minority position without fear of repercussion. I intend to use it . . . as a way to articulate the platform on government spending, government accountability, ethics, and private sector growth."

—Joyce Peterson



Arthur Seaberg

Deciding to retire from the House and run for the Senate was probably a little

easier for Rep. Arthur Seaberg than for any other House member.

"Essentially, the Senate district is the same [size] as my [current] House district with some minor changes," said Seaberg, referring to the dramatic population increase in the Eagan area over the past 10 years.

The Independent-Republican from Eagan now represents nearly 59,000 people — twice as many as any other House member and more than the number of people in 20 current Senate districts.

So the decision to move to the Senate, where the districts are supposed to be twice the size as they are in the House, was an easy one, he said. Although he loves serving in the "more open, more human" House, Seaberg said there are other reasons to run for the Senate.

He said that because the Senate is smaller, it would give him a chance to have greater influence and a chance to serve on more committees.

"I consider myself a generalist anyway," he said.

Seaberg, who runs a small general practice law office from his home, has a relatively low profile at the Legislature and freely admits that he's not "the most vocal person on the floor."

But during Appropriations Committee division meetings, Seaberg frequently questions those who testify in committee in a gentlemanly — and illuminating — fashion.

But ask Seaberg what he feels he does best at the Legislature, and he'll tell you that he listens well — a trait to which many people will attest.

"He is a wonderful advocate for battered women," said Mary Ajax, director of the B. Robert Lewis House in Eagan. "He has really taken the time to learn what the issues are."

She said Seaberg will often phone her before a legislative session begins to see if there are new issues to be addressed on the domestic abuse front.

In the past two years, Seaberg has passed legislation that allows judges to waive the fees required to process a protection order, and allows prosecutors to more easily track past domestic abuse incidents where the defendant is from another state so a harsher sentence can be imposed.

And last year, Seaberg was the chief House sponsor of a bill that requires a court hearing to be held before a person

can be released from an emergency treatment facility such as a detox center.

The bill arose following the highly publicized case of a Sunfish Lake doctor who, after being released from a detox center, fatally shot his wife in front of their two children.

Ajax said Seaberg, whose wife once worked at the B. Robert Lewis House, has "really demonstrated leadership" on the domestic abuse issue.

But she added that he is not limited to tackling such problems on a legislative level. This year, for example, Seaberg suggested that churches and schools be encouraged to become involved in combating the problem.

"He's just real open about thinking in different ways," she said.

—Grant Moos



Sylvester Uphus

Rep. Sylvester Uphus of Sauk Centre believes in term limits and has authored several bills on the subject. So it should come as no surprise that after a decade in the House, the Independent-Republican has decided it's time to move on.

While Uphus has been most visible this year as a death penalty proponent, he prefers talking about past successes, such as securing a \$6 million grant for a Pope County school and bringing Melrose a wastewater disposal plant.

"I ran for office because I felt I had something to offer to the people in my part of the state, and to try to make some changes in government," said Uphus. "Back home, on the various boards that I

belong to, you make decisions and things get done. In St. Paul, the process was certainly something that floored me."

Uphus said the experience has been humbling, especially as a member of the legislative minority.

"My advice to any new people? Try to get along as best you possibly can. Antagonizing others will get you nowhere," said Uphus. "No one ever does anything alone. It takes many people to accomplish even a small thing. This is so all-important — you don't cross people. The power players are important people, and you respect them."

Uphus got a brief taste of Independent-Republican rule in 1985-86, when he served as vice chair of the Agriculture Committee. Rural Minnesota was still in the midst of the farm crisis.

"I remember people driving their tractors here to town, in January, and they didn't have enough money to get them hauled back home again. They parked right in front of the Capitol."

Capitol Security demanded the tractors be removed. Uphus dipped into his own pocket to pay truckers from his district to haul the tractors home.

Uphus also fought hard for legislation that would bring farmers, lenders, and mediators to the same table to work out foreclosure alternatives. The lenders didn't want the mandatory mediation.

"But today those people come to me and say, 'It's working.' Those are the types of things where I feel we made a difference."

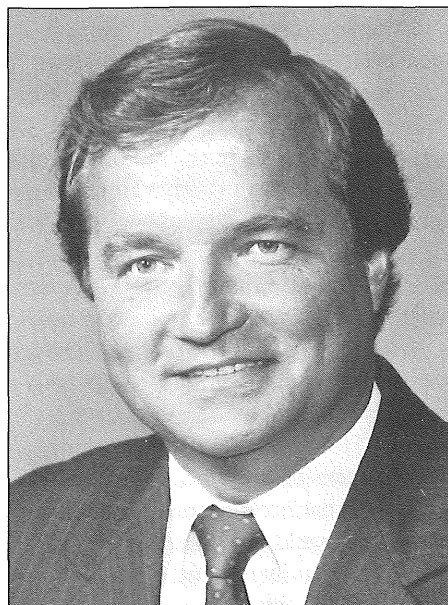
On term limits, Uphus said lawmakers should leave office, even if for just one term, "and live amongst the people, to see if they [as legislators] still have a hold on that world. . . . I think we ought to get back there and see what the real world is doing."

This summer will be the first since 1982 that Uphus hasn't spent campaigning. Instead, he may be in the former Soviet Union. He's been asked to assist in the establishment of cooperatives there. He plans to take it a step at a time. "And when things are tough, you take it a half-step at a time," he said.

"You know it's gone by so darn fast, the last 10 years. You're here [at the Capitol] for six months, and every other year you campaign for three or four months, and things click past you. . . . This is why I think that some of these professional

legislators ought to take some time to smell the roses and wake up. There's really nothing wrong with it."

—John Tschida



Robert Vanasek

After two decades of public service, Rep. Bob Vanasek of New Prague has decided it's time for a change. He doesn't use the word "retire," and he won't rule out future plans for elective office. But what is certain is that his 10th House term will be his last.

When the DFLer announced last June that he would not seek re-election, he was speaker of the House, a position that is generally considered the second most powerful in state government.

So why step down when the step is so large?

"It was important for me that the decision to leave public office be my own decision, and not be affected by external factors," he said. "I did not want to grow stale in office. I didn't want people to say, 'He's been here too long.' That all too often happens with elected officials."

Vanasek was first elected in 1972, a year that ushered in 47 other freshmen representatives. He jumped at the opportunity when the redistricting map of that year created an open seat in his area.

He received more than 61 percent of the vote in his first election and has been returned to the Legislature by comfortable margins ever since.

But in June of last year, the Minnesota High Technology Council came calling and Vanasek took a job as president of

the organization whose objective is to create, attract, and retain technology firms in the state by ensuring that Minnesota has strong mathematics, science, and engineering programs.

The private sector will bring a "healthy new perspective," said Vanasek, adding that the council "has an agenda I am primarily interested in — improving education in Minnesota at all levels."

To focus on one area of public policy is a luxury the speaker doesn't have, said Vanasek. While he enjoyed his four-plus years presiding over the House, he doesn't miss it as much as he thought he would.

"Too often when you're speaker you end up spending most of your time managing everybody else's agenda," he said.

Has he accomplished everything on his legislative checklist?

"No. My agenda at the Legislature is far from complete," he said.

Vanasek sponsored a bill this session to streamline the state's environmental regulation and delivery system. It received a chilly reception in the Senate and has stalled there, but Vanasek said he still believes Minnesota's government structure needs to be re-examined.

"That bill was an attempt on my part to recognize that you cannot have government as usual at a time of fiscal austerity," he said. "By leaving everything alone and just coming in within the budgets, the only thing we're going to ensure is that the quality of services is going to diminish."

When asked to cite his greatest accomplishment, it was not a policy decision that came to mind.

"After serving in the Legislature 20 years I don't think I ever lost touch with my district — I feel I'm leaving office with a good reputation. . . . and good relationships with colleagues both Democrat and Republican."

Such a reputation leads some to suggest higher office for Vanasek, possibly the governorship in 1994. What's next?

"I've learned and come to follow the notion that one should not make long-range plans in politics," he said. "Instead, one should be ready for opportunities as they arise."

—John Tschida