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Walz decides not to seek re-election in light of demanding law enforcement career

BY MIRANDA BRYANT

Growth is most often good for one's career. But in the case of Rep. Dale Walz, growth is stymieing his job — or at least one of them.

The Republican representative from Brainerd has decided not to seek re-election to District 12A. The population growth in his district is placing additional demands on his “day” job — that of captain at the Baxter Police Department. It is no longer possible, he said, to take an annual five-month leave of absence to serve as a legislator.

“There’s problems there with the growth that weren’t there before,” he said, citing an increase in drug crimes and methamphetamine labs. “It’s just not working anymore. I need to be there full time.”

Acting on this realization wasn’t easy for the 39-year-old who was initially elected in 2000. “When I first got elected, in the back of my mind I thought I’d like three terms,” Walz explained.

Though his leave comes sooner than he anticipated, it doesn’t come without a sense of accomplishment.

Walz co-authored the “concealed-carry” bill, signed into law in 2003. It created statewide standards that county sheriffs must use in deciding whether to issue handgun permits to individuals. The law is intended to open the permit process to more people.

Walz also put his name behind the so-called woman’s right-to-know law, approved in 2003. It requires abortion providers to inform patients who are seeking abortions about the risks of the procedures 24 hours before the surgery.

“My district’s very pro-life,” Walz said. The father of three said that he respects the opinions of others, but can’t vote in favor of abortion matters.

“It’s in my heart,” he said, of his pro-life stance.

Walz also co-authored a controversial and unsuccessful bill in 2003 that would have put into law a set of Department of Public Safety rules mandating that the visa expiration date for temporary foreign visitors be printed on that person’s driver’s license or identification card.

“This bill gives law enforcement personnel



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Dale Walz will leave the House after two terms to devote more time to his job as a police captain in Baxter.

the tools they need to enforce the laws of our country,” Walz said last year. “It closes some of the gaps in the system and makes it easier to find those who live here illegally.”

And he supported bills this year to impose tougher sentences on high-risk sex offenders and on methamphetamine makers.

“I would say overall Minnesota is getting very serious about how we handle crimes and criminals,” Walz said.

But there is one item on his “to do” list that he won’t be able to accomplish — that of “getting us totally out of the deficit in the next couple years.”

“It will happen, I just won’t be here to see it,” said the self-described optimist. “All indications are we’ve rounded the corner.”

During the 2003-2004 biennium, Walz served on the committees of judiciary policy

and finance; jobs and economic development finance; and commerce, jobs, and economic development policy.

By his own admission, Walz has been quiet in committee meetings and on the House floor. If he doesn’t have something to add or question, and if his mind is decided on an issue, there’s no point in talking, he explained. But he’s been happy to field questions posed to him as a law enforcement official.

And unless someone from Walz’s profession is elected in the fall, the House will be without a police officer in its ranks. At the start of the 2003 session, Walz was one of three police officers in the 134-member body. One other cop resigned and another has decided not to seek re-election in the fall.

But Rep. Sheldon Johnson (DFL-St. Paul), a probation officer, said the House wouldn’t necessarily be at a disadvantage without a police officer. Law enforcement officials and their lobbyists can continue reporting to the capitol to testify and answer questions, he explained.

What may be missed, however, is the perspective of someone like Walz who knows intimately the issues affecting the men and women in the field, Johnson said.

“I was impressed especially with his concern for the line staff that are actually doing the work in the community,” Johnson said. “He’s aware and dedicated to those doing the work of public safety.”

There are a few things Walz won’t miss — the long hours and the commute between his home and St. Paul. But he will miss the people he’s met while serving in the Legislature.

Said Walz, “I can hold my head up high and say ‘I served in the House of Representatives.’ Not many people can say that.”

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Dale Walz
Republican
District 12A — Brainerd
Terms: 2

Career Notes: In addition to addressing law enforcement issues in the House, Walz has been an advocate for balanced budgets and tax cuts. In 2003 he proposed a property tax freeze for qualified senior citizens. And in light of last year’s multi-billion dollar budget deficit, he proposed a 4 percent salary cut for state legislators and constitutional officers.