

Low-key diplomat . . . Welle seeks metro, rural, suburban cooperation

Mild-mannered. Soft-spoken. Hardly the expected attributes for the traditionally rough-and-tumble role of House majority leader.

Yet those are the most often-mentioned adjectives colleagues use to describe Alan Welle.

Effective is another. That's why the veteran Willmar DFLer was again elected by his caucus to hold one of the House's most demanding leadership posts — a job often putting him in political cross-fire.

After serving his first year as majority leader during the 1992 session, (one regarded by many as both productive and harmonious), Welle said he doesn't plan to change his approach.

"There were a lot of factors that went into the harmony of the last session," he said. "I

"I think the governor is being pushed by a number of members of his party, especially those in the Legislature, to be more confrontational than he was last session," he said.

"When the minority lost so many members after being cooperative, I think they perceive they weren't the beneficiaries of that," he added. "They're pushing the governor to draw more lines in the sand than he did last year."

Another of Welle's duties is often overlooked — that of chief executive of the House itself. As such, he's charged with administering a \$20 million budget and about 250 full-time employees.

In fact, Welle is surprised that his job can be more administrative than political. A year ago, he presumed the opposite to be true. His background in business and edu-

management, a lot of fires that occur because of the political atmosphere that exists in this place," he said. "So every day is kind of an adventure."

The complexion of the 1993 House also poses additional leadership challenges. There are 33 first-time members, 18 of them DFLers.

"Frankly, it's a different first-year group than I've experienced," Welle said. "Many of them were elected on a campaign platform calling for change in the way government operates."

The recent restructuring of House committees is aimed at this call for change with each House member now serving on both a spending committee as well as policy committees.

This session also has more representatives from the suburbs than ever before — and fewer from rural areas. Though bringing a strong rural background to the job, Welle also recognizes issues facing cities and suburbs, and the voting strength of each block of lawmakers.

"Rural members never had enough votes to pass a bill on their own before, and they still don't," he said. "But yet, there's still enough members that you can't pass a bill without them either. So I'm not so sure that, even though there's been a diminished number of [rural] people, the status really changes."

The difficulty, he said, is that urban, suburban, and rural constituencies each perceive their needs are being slighted in different ways.

Cities believe their special needs in dealing with crime and decaying infrastructure are being ignored, while rural areas claim not enough attention is paid to economic issues. Meanwhile, the suburbs argue that they have been gouged by high property taxes for long enough.

Welle's proposed solution, is typically diplomatic.

"The reality is that people are *state* representatives," Welle said. "And I think the challenge is for us to try to keep the rural, metro and suburban lines from being so clearly drawn, and to try to work together."

— Jim Anderson



House Majority Leader Alan Welle presides over a recent meeting of the Rules and Legislative Administration Committee.

just personally think you solve problems a lot easier without confrontation and conflict than you do with [confrontation]. So I try hard to affect things with that kind of style."

Welle senses that nurturing a cooperative spirit may be more of a challenge this session, however, because House DFLers gained ground in last fall's elections.

cation administration has come in handy for the role, which Welle said he enjoys.

And alongside the duties of administrator and chief DFL strategist on the House floor, add diplomat to Welle's job description. In addition to keeping the 86 DFLers rowing more or less in sync, his tenure has been marked by an ability to negotiate.

"There's a lot of what I would term 'crisis