

Meeting his own term limit

Westerberg leaving House, but maybe not politics

Editor's Note: As the 2006 session winds down, several members have announced their intentions to leave the Minnesota House of Representatives for new adventures. They leave a legacy of service that will remain part of legislative history.

By **MIKE COOK**

It may be a stretch to equate four legislative terms to quarters in a football game, but if it can be done, Rep. Andy Westerberg (R-Blaine) has reached the 2-minute warning of his House career.

Westerberg has announced that he will not seek re-election this year.

However, before his career is over, he wants to score one final touchdown with a bill that would create many new jobs and have a significant economic impact in his area.

Westerberg sponsors HF2294, which would provide financing for an Anoka County football stadium that would be home to the Minnesota Vikings. That bill awaits action by the House Rules and Legislative Administration Committee. "It would be really important for me to be able to get that get done for my community and our district because it's a phenomenal project," he said. "I hope we get it done."

That would not be his only potential knockout this session, as Westerberg also sponsors HF3484, which would reestablish the state boxing commission that was eliminated during the 2001 budget cuts.

Westerberg said he wouldn't mind remaining a member of the House, but it would violate something he told constituents.

"I campaigned for term limits. I like the idea of having new blood and new ideas in here,"

he said. "It appears to be the right time for me to look at doing something else."

However, Westerberg may not be stepping away from politics — he is considering a run for the Anoka County Board of Commissioners. "If you see some other areas that you might be able to be helpful in, I think it makes sense to possibly move on to different challenges," he said.

Being a commissioner might also work better with his professional life.

Self-employed in the insurance industry for more than 25 years, Westerberg admits that it can be hard to keep a career going while at the Capitol because members must often spend much of their waking hours in St. Paul for weeks at a time. "A county commissioner position certainly would still be a lot of work, maybe even more, but it would be such that the schedule would be more workable for my business."



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Andy Westerberg would like to see an Anoka County football stadium approved before he leaves the House.

Westerberg said three bills are atop, or near the top, of his list of accomplishments: each in a different area.

He will not see the result of one of those until next year when dirt is moved for a new interchange that will take Highway 242 over Highway 65. The intersection in Anoka County was once ranked the most dangerous in the state.

"This project was not in [the Department of Transportation] 20-year plan, so getting this done took a team effort of the city, county, federal government, everybody getting on board to get this intersection taken care of," he said. "When I found out it was the most dangerous intersection, I created a fund called Money for Safety Improvements on State Trunk Highways with Dangerous Intersections

knowing this was going to be the number one intersection that had to be taken care of, so we funded that account. Thinking outside the box allowed that to occur."


A 2004 equity stripping law that helps people keep from losing their homes is one that Westerberg was "thrilled" to see enacted.

In part, the law could result in a \$10,000 fine or prison time for any foreclosure consultant or foreclosure purchaser who engages in a fraudulent or deceitful practice. "It was getting at people who say they were there to help people who are vulnerable, when they were actually there to steal their equity in the home." Westerberg smiled when noting that the law was used a model for legislation in Connecticut and some other states.

Earlier in his legislative career, Westerberg is proud of a school safety bill that allowed teachers and counselors to talk about a new student, without violating state law.

"We had students that would transfer into school districts and you couldn't talk about them and their past behaviors or whatever they'd done, so you didn't know who was walking the halls of your school," he said. "That is one of the first pieces I was very, very happy about."

Westerberg will leave with some regrets of legislation that did not become law.

"When we're talking job growth I think corporate income taxes are a killer. We're working real hard this session to try to come up with a single sales factor tax, and it's been passed already. It's not going to be implemented until at a point in the future which puts us behind all other states. We should advance that until 2008 and that's one of the things we are working on. It might be in the omnibus tax bill." 

STEPPING DOWN

**Rep. Andy Westerberg
Republican**

District 51A — Blaine

Terms: four (elected 1998)

Advice to successor: "Having a good attitude is really important because you can't control what people are going to do, think or say. If you have a good attitude, you have an ability to listen to what people are saying and analyze it, separate the good from the bad, and come up with informed decisions."