

A change of focus

Personal issues play large role in Borrell decision to step aside after two years in the House

BY MARY KAY WATSON

Despite setbacks that might prove daunting to others, Rep. Dick Borrell (R-Waverly) said he has stood firm in his views and worked hard for his district in his first and, probably, only term as a legislator.

He said highlights of his term have included balancing the budget, the so-called woman's right-to-know law, "concealed-carry," tort reform, restricting same-sex marriage, and repealing the Profile of Learning.

"I don't think we've had accomplishments like that in a long time. And we may not in the future," he said.

Borrell himself will not serve in the House in the future. He said his decision to not seek re-election was influenced by the death of his 47-year-old brother on Oct. 31, 2003.

"This job takes up an awful lot of your life," he said. "I'm perfectly willing to have someone else do it and have more of what's left of my life to enjoy."

The decision was not based on political pressures surrounding recent legal problems, he noted.

In January, Borrell pleaded guilty to a charge of false campaign advertising, agreeing to pay \$1,500 in court costs and to apologize to his opponent and the Wright County attorney.

A second incident relating to an airport arrest after a loaded gun was found in his carry-on baggage is also behind him. "I paid the fine and entered the plea," he said.

He has had a permit to carry a handgun for about 15 years and said he forgot the gun was in his bag.

"It's like having your wallet — it's kind of a part of things," he said. "I just didn't empty the bag."

Borrell, a former Marine, has been a long-time supporter of the so-called "concealed-carry" law. A sign on his office door reads: "Concealed Weapons Welcome Here." After KSTP-TV did a story on that sign, he added a new one reading, "Celebrate Diversity" with drawings of 20 different handguns.

"I'm not one to back away from controversy," he said.



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Dick Borrell has chosen not to seek re-election, after one term in the House.

He worries about how his three daughters can protect themselves, he said, noting that under previous law permits to carry a handgun were not often issued to women.

"At least now that's a decision my daughters can make," he said. "And they won't be disallowed (a permit) because of what county they live in."

Rep. Tim Mahoney (DFL-St. Paul), who sits near Borrell on the House floor, said he enjoys his colleague's sense of humor. "We almost always disagree, but with intelligence and humor. He's given me insights into how I can be a better legislator."

Of the committees he serves on — Civil Law, Education Policy, and Taxes — he said he has especially enjoyed civil law because "most of the really controversial bills come through that committee."

Borrell carried data practices legislation for that committee. Rep. Tom Pugh (DFL-South St. Paul), who served on the civil law and taxes committees with Borrell, said he was a "good shepherd" of that legislation, always diligent in asking members for input.

"Dick is always very inquisitive," Pugh said. "He contributed greatly from the perspective of his experience in small business."

One of Borrell's motivations for running for the House was his dissatisfaction with the Profile of Learning.

"It was prescriptive and subjective," said the former high school business teacher. "It wasn't fact-based. We should be teaching children how to think, not what to think. The profile was more social engineering."


He said the new plan is "a step in the right direction."

Another of the projects he has enjoyed working on this session is personal rapid transit, which has been allotted \$4 million in the House bonding bill.

"PRT is a breath of fresh air," he said. "This is a system that may actually be able to be developed privately without any government subsidy. We subsidize buses about 60 percent."

Borrell grew up in Waverly, where as a teenager he campaigned for Hubert Humphrey. He remained in the DFL party until about 15 years ago when he decided the Republican platform was more in line with his thinking. This is his first elected office, although he made a brief run for governor in 1998.

"It's been a wonderful experience," he said. "I think I've done an excellent job of representing the citizens, and I've just been honored to be able to do that."

He said he would continue to be active in politics. "It's in my blood." 

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Dick Borrell
Republican
District 19B – Waverly
Terms: 1
Career notes: A supporter of "concealed-carry" legislation, Borrell also worked for the successful repeal of the Profile of Learning during his term.