

Family ties

Cox wins a close one and resumes family presence in St. Paul, at a time when family concerns at home aren't pressing any longer

BY MIRANDA BRYANT

Freshman legislator Rep. Ray Cox (R-Northfield) isn't alone in his service to his district. He is surrounded by a large family history related to state government.



Rep. Ray Cox

His mother, Marjorie Cox, ran for the same legislative seat that he now holds. His great grandfather, Edwin Cox, served in the Legislature in the late part of the

19th century. And his grandfather, W.T. Cox, was the first commissioner for what is now the Department of Natural Resources.

"It's nice to know there are people connected to the family that have gone on before you," said Rep. Cox.

Cox himself said he had previously been asked to run for state office, but always declined, citing the young age of his children. "I give credit to all these people who have little kids," Cox said of his colleagues. "I don't know how they manage it."

"Unlike some people, I did not have a hole burning in my heart to be here," said Cox, sitting in his new fourth-floor office.

Cox was already busy with other obligations – owning a construction firm; supporting environmental causes, such as a nature preserve in his district; and serving on the local school board, the chamber of commerce board, as well as on the board of the Northfield Industrial Corporation, a private group that promotes business development.

Children Tristan, Marja, and Diana are all grown now, either having recently completed or currently pursuing college degrees. As such, Cox didn't have as much reason to defer the latest request that he seek a position in the Minnesota House of Representatives.

As Cox recalled, Speaker of the House Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon), came calling. Cox assumed Sviggum simply wanted a larger-than-usual campaign contribution. He was a bit

surprised when Sviggum, known as a dedicated recruiter of legislative candidates, asked him to run for the District 25B seat vacated by Republican Rep. John Tuma.

"I've always been interested in politics," said Cox, who served on the Northfield School Board for 15 years, five as chair.

But, he explained, the school board position was nonpartisan. "It's one thing to run for the school board; it's another to put a little 'R' behind your name."

For his part, Sviggum had no doubts about Cox's potential.

"Ray Cox brought immediate respect and credibility to the race for the open House of Representatives race," Sviggum said. "Ray had the right background of experience, commu-

nity involvement, and philosophy to represent District 25B well."

While the speaker welcomed Cox, the freshman legislator wasn't the preferred candidate for all voters. In fact, Cox's general election victory of 20 votes was so thin that a recount was ordered. In the end he won by 44 votes, out of nearly 18,000 ballots cast.

"It's not exactly what you would call a mandate, but it pushed me in the door," Cox said.

He attributed the close election results to the political diversity of his district. People living in and directly around Northfield have traditionally supported more liberal candidates, while other towns near Faribault have supported candidates with more conservative viewpoints.

The St. Olaf College graduate received appointments to all the House committees on which he wanted to serve – higher education

finance, regulated industries, and environmental and natural resources policy. He was especially pleased to be named vice chair of the latter, particularly since he's a freshman.

Higher education finance appealed to the 51-year-old due to the presence of Carleton College and St. Olaf College in his district. Cox said he knows the K-12 education system thoroughly, but is reading a lot to learn about higher education. Throughout the day he tosses relevant documents into a box in his office that he takes home at day's end.

Cox says he's a strong advocate for higher education, realizing how important a college degree was to his mother, who raised six children by herself. "Without an education she would have really been in tough shape."

On the House Environment and Natural Resources Policy Committee, Cox hopes to see the House and Senate pass legislation banning phosphorous in dish detergents and fertilizers. With a \$4.2 billion projected budget deficit looming over the upcoming biennium, timing is right for such a no-cost measure.

"I think it can be a wonderful time to do

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things that don't have a lot of cost," Cox said.

Constituents have also let Cox know what issues are important to them: maintenance of the current concealed weapons permit process; traffic congestion relief; preservation of clean air and water measures; and guaranteed use of state lands for recreation, hunting and fishing.

DISTRICT 25B

2002 population: 36,590

Largest city: Northfield

Counties: Rice, Scott

Location: southern edge of the Twin Cities metropolitan area

Top concern: "I would like to see if some issues related to the environment could get committee hearings and be passed."

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