

Expanding his commitment

DeLaForest moves to new aspect of public service as a state legislator, after years in military service

By JEFF JONES

Talk of legislators "battling it out" over the state budget, gun control, and other heated issues that come before them doesn't sound



Rep. Chris DeLaForest

quite right to Rep. Chris DeLaForest (R-Andover). The freshman lawmaker served four years in the U.S. Army at Ft. Knox, Ky., and he says images of war shouldn't be applied to the political process.

"In a very real sense, it trivializes the experience of those who have experienced actual combat," he said. "While we deal with very complex and very powerful issues here in the Legislature, it really isn't life or death. At the end of the day, opponents of an issue and proponents of an issue can still shake hands and be friends."

"Politics is a contact sport," he says, "but it definitely is not the same thing as real bullets flying."

DeLaForest sees his job as a legislator as another expression of his commitment to public service and expects his Army background to come in handy in his work here.

"When you're under the kind of stress that military training can force on you, you learn a lot about the human condition and human nature," he said. "And I think that has served me particularly well as a candidate and now hopefully as a legislator in forming the kind of personal relationships that are necessary to be successful."

DeLaForest's political career extends from his college days at St. John's University, where in addition to ROTC programs, he was a member of the College Republicans. His degree is in political science, and after his active duty military service he was campaign manager for Rep. Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover). He became a candidate himself when redistricting created an open seat in his area last spring. "Rep. Tingelstad encouraged me to step up to the plate and run," he said.

Transportation tops the list of issues

important to his Anoka County constituents, DeLaForest says. As a member of both the House Transportation Policy and Transportation Finance committees — and a daily commuter — he hopes to steer state funding to road projects in his area to help bring transportation infrastructure up to date.

DeLaForest co-sponsored legislation to repeal the Profile of Learning and he said residents of his district want to ensure quality education while making sure their tax dollars are spent wisely.

He also said he sees himself as an advocate for outdoors enthusiasts in his area. "There are a lot of sportsmen and anglers in Anoka County, myself included. And so we are very interested in ensuring Minnesota remains a

"In a very real sense, it trivializes the experience of those who have experienced actual combat. While we deal with very complex and very powerful issues here in the Legislature, it really isn't life or death. At the end of the day, opponents of an issue and proponents of an issue can still shake hands and be friends."

— Rep. Chris DeLaForest

quality place to enjoy those pursuits," he said.

His job as an attorney specializing in labor relations earned him a seat on the House Civil Law Committee, where he has the distinction of being the committee's vice-chair in only his first term.

"It was a little bit of a surprise to be appointed to Civil Law and it was very much of a surprise to be appointed vice-chair of that committee," he said.

The man in charge of committee assignments, House Speaker Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon), said DeLaForest has the expertise, talent, and enthusiasm for the job. "I see Chris as being a real leader and up-and-comer within the Republican majority for years to come," Sviggum said.

Already, DeLaForest has had to lead the committee through some contentious issues, including the abortion-related bill that would

require women to receive specific information at least 24-hours before obtaining an abortion. Civil Law Chair Mary Liz Holberg (R-Lakeville) sponsors the bill. "He did a really wonderful job chairing that committee with a very tough issue," Sviggum said.

DeLaForest is sponsoring legislation that would create an anti-terrorism account in the state's budget funded by sales of a special "United We Stand" license plate. Money from the account would go to the state's National Guard and law enforcement units for special anti-terrorism projects and training.

"I'm a veteran, so I have been involved in various anti-terrorism programs on the consumer end of the policy," he said. "Having a dedicated source of revenue to help secure Minnesota's borders and thus America's borders is really one of the foremost priorities of government."

Though he never saw combat during his military service, DeLaForest said he understands the feelings of troops involved in the current conflict in the Middle East. "The people who least want war are soldiers. The

people who are required to carry a rifle into combat hope least that they will be asked to do so," he said. "But America has challenges and guaranteeing our security and guaranteeing peace in the world often entails a price to be paid."

DISTRICT 49A

2002 population: 36,574

Largest city: Andover

County: Anoka

Location: northern Twin Cities suburbs

Top concern: "Anoka County is in desperate need for a real infusion of transportation funding to help bring infrastructure up to 21st century standards."

— Rep. Chris DeLaForest