

Looking for another House

Ellison hopes to bring his experience to Washington, D. C.

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 **BAO ONG**

Rep. Keith Ellison (DFL-Mpls) is more than just a nice guy. "I'm compelled to speak up for the people," said Ellison. "Legislators must uphold values of their people."

Ellison, 42, was endorsed May 6 by his party to replace longtime U.S. Rep. Martin Sabo, who is retiring. His approachability, ability to connect with people and oratorical skills are all reasons why many say he won the endorsement.

But behind the public persona of a legislator, lawyer, father, husband and community advocate, is a man driven by his desire to ensure civil and human rights exist for all people.

"It's not about being on a soap box. I want to engage people," said Ellison. "Giving people a sense that government can help them, that they could be better off, is something I've always tried to do."

Although in the minority party during his two terms in the House, Ellison said he continually pushed for legislation to protect all Minnesotans. He said conservatives used immigration and gay marriage as wedge issues to gain support. "I've always tried to speak for people who aren't treated right," Ellison said.

Fighting for people's rights is nothing new for Ellison. He was the executive director for the Legal Rights Center, and helped spearhead the Minneapolis Civilian Police Review Authority, which investigates and makes recommendations regarding complaints brought against any Minneapolis police officer.

Even as a relative newcomer to the House, Ellison said, from the start, he was never intimidated to get work done. As a congressional candidate,

Ellison said that he is a hybrid of the late-U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone's idealism and Sabo's practicality.

While working on myriad bills, Ellison said he always tried to work with those he shared differences with from the start. "I'm a practical idealist," Ellison said.

Ellison's success is no surprise to Rep. Frank Hornstein (DFL-Mpls), who sits next to him on the House floor.

"He's full of passion and energy and commitment to justice," said Hornstein, who was elected at the same time as Ellison. "I'll remember his continual camaraderie. He's been a friend you can turn to on the House floor."

Hornstein said Ellison's passion should serve him well. Having worked on Wellstone's campaign in the early-1990s, Hornstein said he has not seen a candidate with as much ability to bring the DFL party together since Wellstone. "The number of Republicans coming up to congratulate him the past days shows he can work well with all people," Hornstein said.

Although Ellison grew up in Detroit, he moved to Minnesota in 1987 when he enrolled at the University of Minnesota Law School, where he earned his law degree in 1990. His wife, Kim, is a high school math teacher. They have four children, ages 9 to 17.

Once the House finishes its work, Ellison will have more work to do before he can hit the campaign trail full-time. Ellison, who has his own law practice in north Minneapolis, has some trial work to finish. Most of his work deals with criminal, civil rights and family law cases.

However, if Ellison does win the November election, he plans on keeping his ties to the House. "Hopefully I'll get back here a lot so that Minnesota is well represented in Washington." ❧

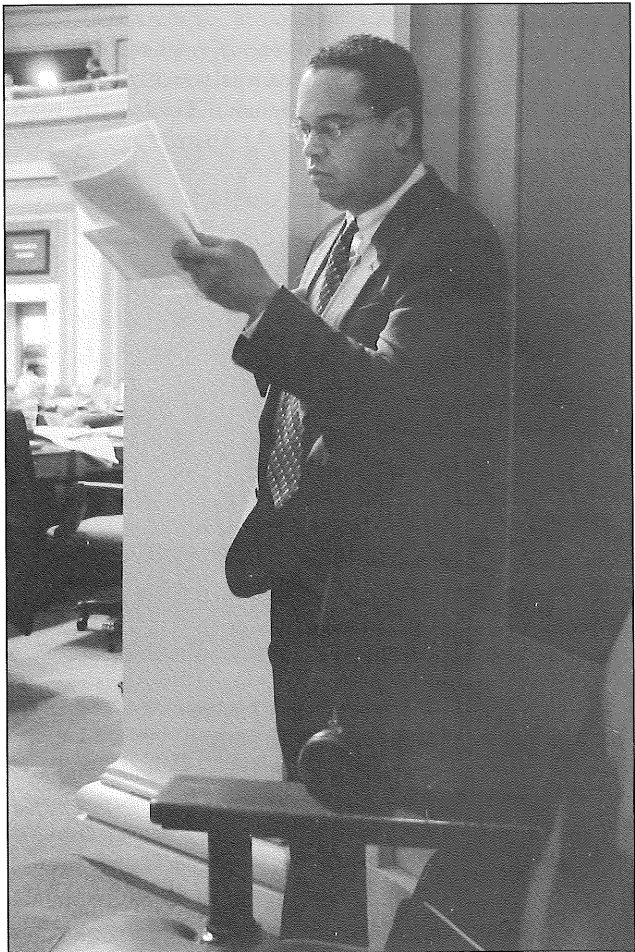


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

After four years, Rep. Keith Ellison looks to move from the Minnesota House to the U. S. House in Washington, D. C.

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Keith Ellison

DFL

District 58B — Minneapolis

Terms: Two (elected 2002)

Advice to successor: "Listen more than you talk. Treat everybody right. Never make personal attacks."