

Three more say goodbye

Heidgerken, A. Peterson and Ruth make late departure announcements

By CRAIG GREEN

Before House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher gavelled in the last floor session of 2008, 10 representatives had announced that they would not seek another term. Two of them — Rep. John Berns (R-Wayzata) and Rep. Scott Kranz (DFL-Blaine) — had served only one term, while Rep. Dennis Ozment (R-Rosemount), served for 24 years. Rep. Connie Ruth (R-Owatonna), just days before the end of session, announced her retirement.

By the time session was adjourned Rep. Bud Heidgerken (R-Freeport), Rep. Aaron Peterson (DFL-Appleton) added their names to the list.



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Rep. Bud Heidgerken

Down the road

Peterson said that for some reason, his family is afflicted with public service. When elected to the House in 2002, he followed his father, former Rep. Doug Peterson (DFL-Madison), who served from 1990-2002, and his grandfather, former Rep. Harry Peterson (DFL-Madison), who served from 1964-1974.

In his farewell speech, the younger Peterson, who served as an assistant majority leader this session, spoke about how the traveling he did throughout the country in the 1990s led him to understand that he “always knew western Minnesota was home.” He also said he was very grateful to Rep. Jean Wagenius (DFL-Mpls), who handed him a handbook on renewable energy and said, “You do it now.” She helped make him who he is today, he said.

Peterson said that regardless of the banter that may go on inside the House Chamber, he always remembers that Minnesota is a wonderful, impressive state. “It’s just great to be a Minnesotan. Sometimes we take it for granted.”

Though he has enjoyed his time of service, and has made many friends, Peterson said it’s time to move on. “Someone sang once upon a time that the secret of a long life is knowing when it’s time to go. So, I’m gonna go. And I’ll see you down the road.”

True and noble

Trying to hold back tears, Ruth said, “It’s an extreme honor to be here. You’re really pretty awesome — the members, the staff, leadership — It’s a huge honor to be here.”

Ruth, who was first encouraged to run for office by former House Speaker Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon), said that when she began in the House in 2001 she thought a lot about the book “Servant Leadership,” by Robert Greenleaf. “To listen first, and then to lead, that’s what I’ve tried to do,” she said.

Ruth said she and her husband plan to spend more time with family, including her five grandchildren.

continued on next page



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Rep. Aaron Peterson

Ruth said two things have kept her grounded at the House. One was a plaque with the inscription "Integrity," and another with the inscription "Excellence." Reading from the second, Ruth said, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is admirable, think on these things."

Ruth encouraged other members to "continue to be the great servant leaders that you are."

Battles and politics

First elected in 2003, Heidgerken was the last retiring member to address the House.

He said that for the most part it was a privilege to be a House member. "I enjoyed the battle, I've always enjoyed battles. But one of the things I did not enjoy, is the partisanship. I've always had a hard time with that."

In a district where he represents more cows than people, Heidgerken said that he was always thinking of how the folks in his district would want him to vote, and that he had the pleasure of representing some of the very best of Democrats and Republicans in the state.

Like Ruth, Heidgerken plans to spend time with grandchildren, while also finding time for fast-pitch softball and helping his wife run their restaurant.

Closing as he began, Heidgerken said, "The partisan politics is the only thing that bothers me. If I could make any changes here, that's the one change I would ask you all to make. To reach out a little bit more." 🍀



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Rep. Connie Ruth