

Law enforcer

Strachan to leave House after one term for promotion to Lakeville police chief

By MIRANDA BRYANT

Rep. Steve Strachan fully expected to be seeking re-election to his House seat this fall. But instead of continuing to craft laws, he'll be enforcing them.

The first-term Republican from Farmington began serving as the police chief in Lakeville April 6. As such, he will not seek re-election in the fall.

Strachan has worked for the police department for 17 years, most recently as a sergeant. He will do both jobs simultaneously until a newly elected state representative is sworn into office in January 2005.

"I never thought I'd be a one-termer," Strachan said, explaining that his leave of the Legislature is bittersweet.

Strachan has had a prominent role during the 2004 session for key pieces of legislation. He is the House sponsor of a bill that would lower the state's blood-alcohol concentration limit for drunken driving from 0.10 to 0.08 percent. The House and the Senate have approved the measure, but disagree on the effective dates. Strachan has been appointed to a six-person conference committee to address the bills' differences.

"I would like to see it finished before I leave," Strachan said. "That's something I know will save lives."

Strachan also helped craft a package of bills toughening the sentencing and monitoring of sex offenders. He sponsored one component of the package, requiring homeless sex offenders who have been released from prison to register their general whereabouts with law enforcement.

The 39-year-old says he is a "pragmatic Republican," otherwise described, he said, as a moderate.

"Sometimes it's easy to say 'That's a bad idea,' because it didn't come from us," Strachan said. But, he said, he makes a practice of accepting good ideas for what they are, regardless of their DFL or Republican origins.

For example, he said, he modified the sex offender bill following a contention by Rep. Keith Ellison (DFL-Mpls) that it was too aggressive on young people engaged in mutually consensual



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Recently named the new chief of police in Lakeville, Rep. Steve Strachan announced that he is leaving the House after one term.

sexual activity. A 20-year-old having sex with a 16-year-old is wrong, Strachan said, "But do we want to put them in jail for life?"

Strachan serves on the House Governmental Operations and Veterans Affairs Policy, Judiciary Policy and Finance, and State Government Finance committees.

"His life experience brought a helpful perspective when we were considering public safety issues," said Rep. Mary Murphy (DFL-Hermantown), DFL lead on the judiciary committee. "Besides that, he has a wonderful sense of humor and an innate respect for and kindness to others."

Last year Strachan was also appointed to Gov. Tim Pawlenty's Stadium Screening Committee. The group was charged with making recommendations to the Legislature on the possible financing and construction of professional sports stadiums for the Twins and the Vikings in the metropolitan area.

"I think the governor is on the right track," Strachan said. "He's sort of focusing on 'This is a problem and it's not going to go away.'"

Strachan previously served on the Farmington City Council before being elected to the newly redrawn District 36B in 2002. Some of the stereotypes of the Legislature have proven true, he said, such as posturing by legislators and intentional distraction from the issues.

Conversely, he said, there are a number of good Republicans and DFLers in the Legislature.


"A huge majority on both sides are here for the right reasons," Strachan said of his peers. "I can leave here honestly saying I've done all I can to create solutions rather than division."

Strachan says he has taken extra measures to keep his constituents informed of his initiatives and the workings of the Legislature. On a Weblog he offers through the House Web site, Strachan posts everything from updates on specific bills, to links to newspaper articles, to jokes.

He began the Weblog to better address the diverse character of his district and as an effort to explain why things occur at the Legislature.

"I think people sort of appreciate straight talk," Strachan said. The Weblog has proven popular, urging him to continue it in his new job.

Strachan said he would leave the Legislature with an appreciation for the many friends he has made at the Capitol, and a stronger connection with his ancestry. Using the resources at the Legislative Reference Library, Strachan learned that his great grandfather, a Scottish immigrant, was a Minnesota legislator during the Civil War.

"It sounds like a platitude, but having the opportunity to serve as a state representative is a tremendous opportunity. When I'm 95 years old I'll be able to look back and say I was a state representative." 

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Steve Strachan
Republican
District 36B — Farmington
Terms: 1

Career Notes: As a career police officer, Strachan worked on many issues affecting the law enforcement community. He was chief sponsor of a bill that would require multi-line telephone systems, such as those in apartment buildings, to provide 911 caller locations. He also sponsored a bill that would regulate the ownership of dangerous animals, such as bears, primates, and lions.