

# Lawyer, legislator ... judge?

## Newman stepping down after four years in the House

**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 IRENE VOTH

Rep. Scott Newman (R-Hutchinson) is making a career move. While "stepping down" is the usual phrase describing a legislator's decision to vacate his or her seat in the House, Newman's move might be termed a "step up" or maybe even a "step on."

After all, if elected to the bench of Minnesota's First Judicial District in the 2006 general election, Newman may make rulings by which many in Minnesota, including its legislators, must abide.

Newman said his reasons for wanting to serve as a judge are the same as his reasons for wanting to serve as a legislator: "I wanted to contribute in a larger way to the legislative process."

He cites several recent court decisions that have influenced his decision to serve the judicial process. One is the March 2006 ruling by a judge in the Second Judicial District against a petition filed by Newman and others in August 2005 after Finance Commissioner Peggy Ingison issued checks to fund government services for which the Legislature had not made appropriations.

"With the Legislature failing to pass a budget by June 30, the judicial branch

appropriated and spent money from the state treasury. The state constitution authorizes only the Legislature to do that. I was amazed," Newman said.

A lawyer for 32 years, Newman said a second recent ruling helped him finalize his decision to make the judicial run: judicial candidates now have a right to talk about disputed legal issues and to be endorsed by political parties.

"The ruling means that judicial candidates can finally talk about the issues so voters can make informed decisions. Too many times, the judicial section of a ballot is left blank because



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

**Rep. Scott Newman seeks the Republican Party's endorsement for a seat on the First Judicial District bench.**

the voter has no idea who the candidates are or what they stand for," said Newman, who is seeking the Republican Party endorsement.

"My choice is to take action and try to bring the judicial branch of government out from under the cloak of secrecy. I want the spotlight to shine on this branch of government, and citizens to begin to understand its function," he said.

Understanding how the Legislature functions was one way he benefited from the first bill he sponsored.

"It involved correcting survey markers,

was non-controversial and was given to me, I suspect, just to help me learn the process. This is something that is often done to help neophytes. Ultimately it was signed by the governor," he said.

Newman soon applied himself to a host of issues that challenge even the most seasoned lawmaker. "I was very involved with the public safety omnibus bill and on the conference committee last year. There were a number of provisions that were controversial, but necessary that we pushed through," he said. Regulating the sale of pseudoephedrine to inhibit the manufacture of methamphetamine was one.

"There's been an 80 percent reduction in meth labs statewide," Newman said of regulations' effect since last year.


Newman also successfully supported stiffer penalties for predatory criminals.

"Those people are sick, sick, sick and I don't think you can fix them," he said, referring to the alleged killer of Dru Sjoden, a Minnesota woman who attended college at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks. The suspect is a convicted sex offender who had been released from prison only months before the woman's kidnapping and death in 2003.

The stiffer laws allow for what Newman calls "the worst of them" to be imprisoned for life.

Collecting a DNA sample from a person arrested for committing a violent crime when probable cause has been established was also an aspect of that legislation.

"DNA is so important — sometimes that's all you've got," Newman said, adding that having the DNA report on file is crucial, especially since predatory criminals have a tendency to relocate frequently.

This biennium, Newman served on the House Education Finance, Ethics, Public Safety Policy and Finance and Transportation committees. 

### STEPPING DOWN

**Rep. Scott Newman**

**Republican**

**District 18A**

**Terms: Two (elected 2003)**

**Advice to successor: "Study, learn the issues and follow your conscience. Don't try to please all of your constituents; it can't be done, and in the end you'll stand for nothing."**