

As Clown, He Helps Kids Laugh; as Legislator, His Job Is Less Fun

By ROLF FELSTAD
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"You make a face at one of the mentally retarded children," said the man with the big red nose, daubed face and gaudy clown suit, "and you ought to see him laugh."

"A thrill just goes right through you."

It doesn't take elaborate tricks, he added, to please the handicapped youngsters at state schools like those in Faribault, Minn.

THE CLOWN is funny, and they giggle.

"Maybe it's because they don't see so much of life."

When the red nose and the showy clothes come off, the clown becomes Rep. Herman J. Kording, Minneapolis, a quiet man in a quiet suit, with a white shirt and a necktie colored a retiring blue.

Instead of making people laugh, he may make them cry, because Kording is chairman of the appropriations subcommittee that will tell them what buildings they can't have from this session of the legislature.

With four other representatives, he has been touring institutions at places like Anoka, Faribault, Rochester, Red Wing, Waseca, Duluth, Moose Lake, Willmar and Fergus Falls.

Many of them he also has visited as one of the Selim Grotto troupe of Masonic clowns.

"I have been disappointed," said Kording, "because there doesn't seem to be any general plan on which building requests are based."

AT FARIBAULT, for instance, the so-called "old main" houses patients, administration, warehouse and auditorium—an auditorium small enough, incidentally, so that the Selim Grotto clowns have to give three performances.

"If new buildings are to be put up," says Kording, "there should be definite determination on what functions they should replace. Then in time the old main could be torn

down. If it isn't, pressure will build up in the future, and they'll be right back in the old main again.

"The same thing is true at St. Peter and Rochester."

Kording is a sponsor of a plan to set up a continuing commission to study long-term building needs.

If this proposal is adopted, the south Minneapolis representative feels that the legislature will appropriate enough money for "immediate" building needs and check the rest up to the interim study group.

Gov. Freeman's request for eight million dollars to take care of "firetrap" situations will be met "in the long run," Kording said he believes. It should be integrated, he said, into an over-all plan.

"TAKE ANOKA state hospital, part of the governor's emergency request," he added.

"There is no specific plan for replacement. If you take patients off the top floor, as the governor proposes, and leave those older buildings standing, the minute they're pressed for room they'll have to use the top floors again."

One of the troubles with Minnesota's mental institutions, most agree, is that they were not constructed with a modern

program or a large patient population in mind.

"As the problem increased," Kording pointed out, "they just kept shoving beds closer together; until now at some places they're side by side. In these situations it's extremely difficult for the nurses and aids to provide proper care."

Even the governor's proposal of a vast building program over a long period "won't come anywhere near solving the state's building needs," Kording said.

"IF YOU THINK in terms of, say, \$10,000,000 for Brainerd, \$2,000,000 for Rochester, \$1,000,000 at Anoka and \$5,000,000 for a new state office building, you're already up to \$18,000,000 without even considering the University of Minnesota."

The state office building, in Kording's opinion, is a "real need."

Kording, a second-termer, is a millwright when the legislature is not in session. He was born near Hayfield, Minn.

Long an active DFL member, Kording prefers a back-row seat in the house chamber, but a knife-like quality in his voice spreads it through the big room without benefit of microphone.

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