

Collaboration over discipline

Whips rely on communication as session moves forward

By ERIN SCHMIDTKE

The title of “whip” originally referred to the man who kept the hounds “whipped in” during a hunt. Nearly 100 years since the term became a part of American politics, its meaning has evolved.

Today, the role is more associated with collaboration than discipline. Rep. Larry Hosch (DFL-St. Joseph) is a minority whip. He said, “I think if you do your job right, you get to a point where you don’t have to twist arms, but you’re able to come to a consensus as a caucus with good communication.”

Whips have several different responsibilities within the House. When a vote is approaching, especially on a controversial bill, whips gauge support and relay that information to the leader. Whips are also responsible for counting members’ votes on a bill.

Ofentimes, the role requires strategizing with other leadership within the caucus. That’s something Rep. Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park) appreciates.

“I like having the opportunity to sit down in a smaller group and let [the minority leader] know my thoughts on things. And the role of a whip is like the role of a state rep., with the caucus being our district. The

job is to listen and let our leader know what the caucus is thinking and feeling,” she said.

Within the caucuses, whips may or may not be elected. The Republican caucus has one majority whip and six assistant whips. Only the majority whip, Rep. Rod Hamilton (R-Mountain Lake), was elected. The six assistant whips volunteered for their positions. In the DFL caucus, the four minority whips were appointed by the minority leader. Their party does not have any assistant whips.

Whips work with each other to ensure that knowledge is shared across a party. Hamilton has incorporated that into his philosophy. “If you go in with the mentality about communication and preparation, that makes the job easy,” he said.

Whips frequently need to speak with other members about issues. Because this biennium has brought many new members to the House, being in a position of whip makes it easier to become acquainted with freshmen legislators. Rep. Ron Shimanski

(R-Silver Lake), an assistant whip, said, “With 72 [Republican] members, approximately 30 of them being freshmen, it takes us a while to get around and be acquainted. It’s allowed me that personal contact.”

Being a whip means helping other whips, too. The need for mobility and rapid communication is critical on the House floor. Whips are often seated near the group of members they’ve been assigned to monitor, or on aisles so the majority or minority leader is readily accessible. That’s important, especially for Hamilton.

He highlighted his relationship with Rep. Tim Sanders (R-Blaine), who is an assistant whip. When moving quickly is required on the House floor, Sanders frequently helps Hamilton, who has been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

This position has a number of challenges. The logistics the whips must manage can occasionally become a problem. Hosch and Shimanski both cited counting votes before an official floor session as a frustrating part of the job, especially when members are away from the Capitol and difficult to reach. However, it’s a small price for a position they enjoy.

“One of the things I don’t like is a day-to-day office job that has predictability and a boring atmosphere,” Hosch said. “This job definitely doesn’t have that.”

Republican whips



Majority Whip
Rod Hamilton

Assistant Majority Leaders



Kurt Daudt



Bob Gunther



Joe Hoppe



Tim Kelly



Jenifer Loon



Paul Torkelson

Democratic whips



Deputy Minority Leader
Debra Hilstrom

Minority Whips



Melissa Hortman



Larry Hosch



John Lesch



Terry Morrow