

Retiring from public service — again

After helping others for 48 years, Haws to focus on family needs

By **LAUREN RADOMSKI**

When Rep. Larry Haws (DFL-St. Cloud) took to the House floor May 16, he offered an explanation as to why he'd waited until the last night of session to announce he would not seek re-election.

"One of the reasons that I would do it this way is I have no resistance to my friends trying to talk me out of things," he said.

Haws, a former Stearns County commissioner who was elected to the House in 2005, said his family is going through "some serious health challenges."

"This is an honorable place to serve, but when your family has a need, that's God's work and I'm going to do God's work," he said. "Thanks for allowing me to serve with you."

A former teacher and longtime coach, Haws has served the St. Cloud area in different capacities for most of his life. He spent 32 years in the St. Cloud Park Department — including 17 as director — an experience that put him in touch with many different community groups. Over the years he recruited 2,000 volunteers annually and garnered \$8.4 million in donations, resources that were particularly helpful in difficult budget years.

Haws was approached by the DFL, Republican and Independence parties to run for a House seat when former Rep. Joe Opatz stepped down. He decided the policies of the DFL were the best fit with his views, which he's never kept secret.

"Everybody in town knows me and they already know my opinions," he said.

Haws said he is proud of his collaboration with Gov. Tim Pawlenty and Rep. Dan Severson (R-Sauk Rapids) in 2007 to pass a major veterans benefits bill. Haws had committed to working

on behalf of veterans after coaching children who later served in Vietnam as adults. He'd also worked on veterans issues during his eight years as a county commissioner.

As was the case with the veterans bill, Haws has worked closely with lawmakers who hold very different opinions from him on many topics. The key to success has been to focus on a shared goal.

"That policy or project or program is much more important than the area in which you conflict," he said.

Haws is also proud of his sponsorship of parks legislation that benefitted rural regional parks and earned him recognition from The Trust for Public Land, a national land conservation organization. He's also

been recognized by fellow lawmakers, who nominated him for "Legislator of the Year" three times.

Haws has observed that it takes much longer for constituents to feel the effects of legislation than it does a decision by a city council or county board. At the local level, a decision can be made on Monday, with feedback to decision-makers by Wednesday, and a change to the policy on Friday, Haws said. On the other hand, it may take months to correct a law that was poorly thought out or has an unintended consequence.

That makes communication with constituents especially important, Haws said. He's been diligent in that respect.

"It would not be unusual for me to have 100 contacts (with constituents) in a given week," he said.

Haws said he's thankful for the friendship of fellow lawmakers and the guidance of House staff. A member of two-dozen St. Cloud area boards, he expects to stay busy serving his community — he just won't be doing it at the Capitol.

"I don't think my life is going to change a lot," he said, adding his calendar is already pretty full.

Haws is also looking forward to working on his family's organic farmers market and coaching his grandchildren in soccer and running.

"I've been a public servant for 48 years, I've retired three times and every one of them was terrific," he said.



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

Rep. Larry Haws is proud of his collaboration to pass a major veterans benefit bill.

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Larry Haws
DFL

District 15B - St. Cloud

Terms: 3 (elected 2005 special election)

Advice to successor: "Try to vote on what you think is right and do research on the bills you're voting on."