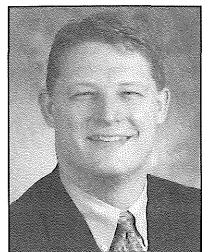


No stranger to the Capitol

Berns looks to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor

By Nick Busse

In an article in the May 12, 2006, issue of Session Weekly, retiring Rep. Barb Sykora (R-Excelsior) left a piece of advice for her



Rep. John Berns

because she was a great legislator, I will always listen and be there for my constituents," Berns said.

No stranger to the Capitol, Berns works as Gov. Tim Pawlenty's No. 2 lawyer. He is also a volunteer firefighter, a former prosecutor, former city council member, former conservation district board member,

and — last but not least — a proud dad. He and his wife have three children, the youngest of which was born right before last year's election.

But Berns, who grew up in a small Iowa farm town "in the middle of nowhere," is especially excited about his newest challenge.

"I'm very honored to be here. Probably like most people who are elected, you never imagine growing up as a kid that you'll have the opportunity to serve in the Minnesota House of Representatives," he said.

As a legislator, Berns' priorities include several common themes like education, property taxes and health care, as well as one that's not so common.

"If you look at the map, my district's got a big blue spot in the middle of it, which is Lake Minnetonka," Berns said, adding that 10 of the 11 cities in his district touch the lake. He said he'd like to see the state focus more

DISTRICT 33B
2002 population: 39,943
Largest city: Minnetonka
County: Hennepin
Top concerns: Education, property taxes, health care and invasive aquatic species

on controlling the spread of invasive aquatic species.

"I really want to make sure the state does everything it can to prevent zebra mussels from invading," Berns said. "At the same time, the state needs to do more research to eradicate milfoil. Those are really big issues in my district."

As for being a Republican in a DFL-controlled Legislature, Berns said he's optimistic.

"We have so much in common, both as people and as public servants who want to get things done, and that really makes me feel good."

Keeping himself accessible

Gardner's blog helps him connect with constituents

By Lee Ann Schutz

Besides being a new member of the House, Rep. Paul Gardner (DFL-Shoreview) claims new membership to the Minnesota chapter



Rep. Paul Gardner

of the General Society of the War of 1812, a group of descendents from the historic war.

Gardner's avid interest in genealogy, and his 15-year search of his family's lineage, led to documentation that his great-great-grandfather played a significant role in the war.

But tracing his family roots is not the only area where he has a strong interest — just bring up the topic of recycling.

Gardner stepped down as executive director of the Recycling Association of Minnesota after his election. Between his family of four's

composting and recycling efforts, they don't generate enough garbage to fill a 30-gallon container weekly.

An avid recycler since his college days, he recognizes how the state can benefit economically from recycling efforts. "We actually need more recyclables. Countries, like China, are buying up scrap metal, aluminum and plastic. And this has driven up the price, making the business of recyclables attractive," he said.

Gardner earned his House seat by the slimmest margin of any member. His 55-vote lead triggered an automatic recount, where four of those votes went to his opponent.

Throughout the campaign, he focused on five issues: education, affordable health care, transportation, environment and rising property taxes.

"Transportation is very important to my constituents. I-694 is a bottleneck between 35E and 35W. That hasn't been on the

DISTRICT 53A
2002 population: 36,629
Largest city: Shoreview
Counties: Anoka and Ramsey
Top concerns: Transportation, education, health care, environment and property taxes

(construction) calendar because of funding issues. I think you will see a big suburban push for transportation funding," he said.

To make government more transparent and accessible to his constituents, Gardner has established his own weekly blog at www.paulgardner53a.blogspot.com. "It's not commentary, but it's a chance for people to see who is coming to the office. I really want constituents to speak up," he said.

Gardner also serves on the House Energy Finance and Policy and Environment and Natural Resources Finance divisions; House Environment and Natural Resources Committee; and is vice chairman of the Minnesota Heritage Finance Division.