

# Education still top priority

## Former teacher Benson wants to see improvements

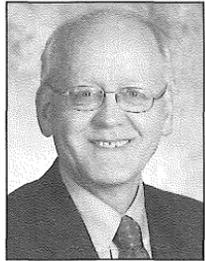
By **SONJA HEGMAN**

Rep. John Benson's (DFL-Minnetonka) political roots run deep.

His ancestors, former Republicans, were active participants in the Farmer-Labor movement. His uncle traveled with former President Theodore Roosevelt to inspect the Panama Canal. His parents had many political discussions at the dinner table when

Benson was growing up. And Benson himself had several conversations with Hubert Humphrey.

Originally from Montana, Benson's family saw good times and bad. His father was a big poker player and, family rumor has it, this kept the family afloat. A lover of card games as well, Benson enjoys the game bridge because



**Rep. John Benson**

“you psych out your opponent and it helps stave off Alzheimer's disease.”

A retired high school teacher, Benson taught language arts, social studies and economics during his 34-year career in Edina. He was recruited for that teaching position, and considers his election to the House as the first job interview he has ever had.

Since his retirement in 1999, he has volunteered many hours to campaigns. When freezes and cutbacks on education funding occurred in 2003, Benson became frustrated with the Legislature.

“I was unable to shut up,” he said. “That's why I ran.”

Benson won the seat held for nine terms by a Republican, Ron Abrams, who was appointed to a judgeship last year.

Education is a top concern in Benson's district. The Hopkins School District is in a statutory operating debt, meaning it has spent more money than it has and does not have a

## DISTRICT 43B

2002 population: 36,921

Largest city: Plymouth

County: Hennepin

Top concerns: Education, property tax relief and health care

reserve budget, a violation of state law, he said. A neighborhood school was closed because of this as a way to offset some of the district's costs. Benson does not want other schools to close in his district, he said, and wants to see a change in the way education is funded.

“I'm interested in the education of every kid in the state,” Benson said. “Our kids are the future. We need to invest in them.”

Benson is very optimistic about his first session, and said people in both caucuses can see “we need to move” on various issues. He's also interested to see what will be decided with the budget surplus.

“It's tough to make a buck, and we shouldn't just spend because we have it,” he said.