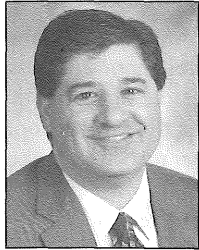


Passion for education

Tillberry goes from school board to statehouse

By **MIA SIMPSON**

Rep. Tom Tillberry (DFL-Fridley) knows the issues he wants to affect, and they all have something to do with young people.



Rep. Tom Tillberry

As a high school counselor, he's seen and helped treat many problems facing youth: drugs, academics, mental illness, homelessness, college and career. He's also been a school board member and a teacher's union organizer.

"I think the times, the way they are right now, I have to get involved," he said. "I'm just asking for fairness. Life is hard enough. Can't we help each other?"

His first stint in public service was 2005, when he was elected as a write-in candidate for the Fridley School Board. For a half-decade prior, he was a negotiator and representative for Education Minnesota in Roseville, the city where he's worked as a school counselor for 11 years.

He decided to run for state office after he was approached by former Rep. Connie Bernardy, who announced last July that she would not seek re-election.

"She asked me if I would do it," he said. "I've always been a supporter of hers. The support that I got from her campaign was wonderful."

He remembers nights during the campaign when dozens of students gathered in his family's basement to stuff literature and prepare other campaign materials. He has deep respect for his young supporters, and a concern for making sure they get the best from their schools.

"I can talk education all over the place," he said.

Tillberry has traveled to several South American countries on medical missions and music tours – he plays trumpet in his church orchestra – and to visit foreign classrooms.

"I've seen students there eager to learn," he said. "A lot of them don't even have a fair opportunity."

DISTRICT 51B

2002 population: 36,686

Largest city: Blaine

Counties: Anoka, Ramsey

Top concerns: Education, health care and property taxes

He simulated the political process for students at Roseville Area High School in an attempt to engage them in politics. In one case, Tillberry showed video of floor debate on a bill, and asked students whether they thought it deserved passage. They didn't.

Tillberry said it's important to make issues and governmental process real for young people, especially as education funding drops.

"Eventually, our pride in our state is falling apart," he said. "I'm seeing it in student apathy."

Tillberry sits on the House Commerce and Labor, E-12 Education and Taxes committees, and the House Education Finance and Economic Competitiveness Division of the House Finance Committee.