

# A fast learner

## Petersen says state should practice 'kitchen table budgeting'

By KRIS BERGGREN

Rep. Branden Petersen (R-Andover) was something of a dark horse candidate: he's young, lacks a postsecondary degree and had never run for elected office. Even after his late entry into the race, he beat a seasoned city official for the Republican endorsement, and he learned fast how to win again.



Rep. Branden Petersen

"I outworked her, called every delegate, went to every precinct caucus," said Petersen, who beat DFL incumbent Rep. Jerry Newton on Election Day.

Petersen has lived in his district since the age of 8, playing Little League and attending Coon Rapids High School. He married his

high school sweetheart, Jessica. His parents live close by, as does his wife's family.

"It's very much my community. This is my hometown," Petersen said.

Petersen said that not completing college was a financial decision. "I had to pay for my own school. That's how the cookie crumbles," he said. Instead, he worked his way up the ladder at Lowe's, the home improvement company, and became an area sales manager.

Less than a year ago, he and Jessica married, bought a home, moved in and now are expecting a baby. Meanwhile, Petersen spent months commuting to work an hour and 40 minutes each way between Andover and Mankato. He took a reduced-capacity position at a store closer to home to make time for campaign activities.

Making ends meet is also the reality for his constituents. Petersen thinks the state should take note of their "kitchen table budgeting."

### DISTRICT 49B

Population (2009 est.): 37,893

Largest City: Coon Rapids

County: Anoka

Top Concerns: Equity in education funding, mandate reduction, zero-based state budgeting

"Lots of people pointed out that, in the last two or three years, they're making the same or less, but the state keeps giving cost-of-living increases," Petersen said. "They pointed out the hypocrisy there, especially when they're paying for state government."

Other priorities include funding equity for schools that have high needs but not the revenue to match, and "value-added" teacher evaluations measuring effectiveness by students' yearly progress, not only their proficiency. He also wants mandate reductions to cities and counties to soften the blow of state cuts to local government aid that he said seem likely.