

Remarks by  
EDWARD A. BURDICK  
at Dedication Ceremony  
in House Chamber  
Wednesday, May 23, 1990

Speaker Vanasek, Majority Leader Long, Minority Leader Schreiber, Members, Former Members, Former Speakers, Special Guests and Friends:

Frankly, I've been carrying these notes in my pocket for over a month because I was afraid you'd surprise me someday and I wouldn't be prepared. Also, Speaker Vanasek, until today I was suspicious that this might be another of your practical jokes. I'm relieved that it was me under that veil and not someone else.

I'm sincerely grateful for this recognition and I accept it on one condition - - - that you let me share this honor with all legislative staff and with the other people behind the scenes. I can not and do not claim sole credit for any success I might have had in my career. I publicly acknowledge and thank those staff people who have helped me. Without their support I would not be here today.

I also wish to thank leadership, past and present, including Speakers, Majority Leaders and Minority Leaders, and other House members who made my employment possible. Little did I know when I took a temporary job in 1941 that I'd still be hanging around this place nearly a half-century later.

There is something that perhaps needs additional explanation. I have not worked fulltime in this room for my entire adult life. When I started there were no fulltime

legislative employees.

In 1941 I was a session-only employee, the same with 1943 and 1945. They brought me to this very desk for the 1947 session where I worked again in the 1949 session. I was in the military service and missed the '51 session but I was fortunate enough to come back for the '53 session. Most people don't believe me when I tell them that I started work here 14 years before our senior House member, Willard Munger, was a freshman in 1955. I didn't become a fulltime legislative employee until 1957. My point is: in those early years, like other staff, I needed to find employment between biennial sessions. Part of the time I worked in my father's country newspaper office in southern Minnesota and I still have some printer's ink in my veins. I always said "If this job goes sour I'll buy a county seat newspaper someplace and write glowing editorials about the legislature." My purpose for mentioning this is that I always considered this to be temporary employment. I'm certainly not complaining about the lack of tenure because we all know that legislative members have no job security. Nevertheless, for nearly fifty years I said to myself "enjoy this session - it might be your last one."

Quitting a fulltime job and coming back here to take a session-only job in the early years was sometimes difficult to explain to my employer, my family and my friends, but I could not stay away from this place. It was like I had a disease and there was no cure. I was overcome by the excitement of the session.

I was fascinated by the process and especially by parliamentary law. I wanted to be a part of it. Today I'm positive those early decisions were the right ones for me. I hope, however, there are some achievements besides longevity for which I might be remembered.

I'm fully aware that every two years my re-employment needed the approval of leadership and other House members in order for me to survive this risky business. I must have been blessed with a great deal of luck. Sometimes I was skating on thin ice, I know. One Majority Leader told me some years ago that I was too aggressive. The Speaker that same year told me I wasn't aggressive enough. One of these assessments had to be wrong and I've sometimes wondered which one. I've worked for 13 Speakers and each one had a style of his own. My task was to discover that style and try to adjust to it. But I'll tell you something: I've never met a Speaker I didn't like! (And you thought I wasn't a very good politician?)

I have always held a great deal of admiration for the office of Speaker. It's a tough job. It's a lonesome job. It's not easy sitting on that podium with so many people watching, knowing no matter what decision you make someone is going to be unhappy. And I have always held a great deal of admiration for all members of the Legislature. In my opinion, serving as a member takes a great deal of sacrifice and dedication. It's public service at its very best! And I've always been impressed with the respect that members have for each other, no matter their

political affiliation or point of view.

I have another confession to make: The first time I saw this magnificent building I fell in love with it, and with the honorable people working here, and I'm still in awe of this building and its occupants. I've been in 45 of the nation's state capitol buildings and I've yet to find one I like more than this one.

This afternoon is an excellent opportunity to compliment the members of the Restoration Committee for the outstanding job they did restoring this chamber. It's historic - yet functional. The committee was chaired by Representative Rodosovich and other members were Representatives Murphy, Sparby, Blatz and Valento. I'm especially grateful for the improved facilities in the adjoining offices. To complete a job on schedule and within budget deserves everyone's praise. The House Information Office published an excellent brochure on the restoration project. There are copies at the registration tables out front. If you didn't get a copy you might want to pick one up when you leave.

It's no secret that there was some criticism for installing a bronze bust of someone who has not yet died or at least someone who has not retired. Maybe we have a problem because I am not prepared to announce either of those events today.

It was suggested that I steal a few minutes of your time this afternoon and talk about history - - - what it was like when I started working here in the early '40's. I have some friends here today who were also here in the "good old days."

We'll see if their memory agrees with mine.

To begin with, the sessions lasted only 90 days and we met every other year. In 1962 the session was extended by constitutional amendment to 120 days but we still met every other year. Annual sessions didn't start until 1974.

The House had less than 100 employees and like I mentioned earlier none was fulltime. Maybe 99 staff would be employed, that was the cut-off, 99, but never 100 - that was considered extravagant.

Members in 1941 were paid a salary of \$500 per year or \$1,000 for the entire two-year term. This was increased in 1945 to \$1,000 per year or \$2,000 per two-year term. My salary was \$25 a week and of course there were no benefits of any kind for members or staff. Now I sometimes cringe when employees haggle over a couple hours vacation.

The House had 131 members in 1941. In 1959 it was raised to 135 members. In 1972 membership was lowered by the Federal Courts to 134, an even number. Some old timers warned that an even number was dangerous and that someday there might be a tied House. The judges replied that the odds were very much against it and that it would probably never happen in our time. Six years later we had a tied House.

The entire chamber was not carpeted until 1969. When I first came to work there was carpet in the aisles only, and the rest of the floor was a grey colored, hard tile.

The old chamber was very dark. Candle power was only 18 or 20. Each employee at the front desk had an individual lamp. Light was increased in the 1960's when television started to cover the sessions. I believe candle power here now is around 70.

A voting machine had been installed for the first time in 1937. Blank roll calls were not automatically fed like today and the equipment gave the desk crew considerable trouble. It was not unusual to recess a few minutes each day to repair or adjust the voting equipment.

There was not a microphone on each member's desk but pages sitting on the front bench would carry a large, heavy, clumsy portable mike and plug it in when a member was recognized to speak. Some members would refuse to use a mike thinking they had loud voices and could be heard without a mike. That wasn't always true. But it was more quiet in the chamber then it is today.

There were no private offices or private telephones for members. Committee chairs shared a room with 2 or 3 other committee chairs. Those rooms served as both hearing rooms and offices for the chairs. The other 100 or so members shared this chamber as their office. When members came in the morning they would hang their coats in lockers in the west hallway and would pick up their mail in the postoffice which is now House Index. They would open their mail here in the chamber. If they wanted to dictate a letter they'd send for a stenographer who

would come walking into the chamber with a note pad and a folding chair. The steno pool was in the east hallway.

The Chief Clerk's Office and House Supply were on the 3rd floor at the top of the stairway and were not very accessible to the members or the public. House Index was located in the area that is now the new ladies restroom.

Yes, I worked in the days when we covered the clock and "borrowed" (that word is in quotes) the three days that the Governor was allotted to sign bills. That practice was stopped in 1961 when Governor Elmer L. Andersen and Secretary of State Joe Donovan refused to accept bills that were passed when the clock was covered.

Air conditioning in public buildings was not provided in those days. Smoking was permitted every place and by the end of each day this room was blue with smoke. There were old-fashioned spittoons by each member's desk. On cold, winter mornings the Sergeant-at-arms would build a fire in the fireplace in the Retiring Room.

Of course there were no copy machines, no computers, no fax machines. It was virtually impossible to furnish current copies of bills, amendments, conference committee reports, etc. for members or the public. The 1941 permanent journal had 2,000 pages. The permanent journal for 1989-90 will be over 15,000 pages.

The House had only two female members in 1941, the Senate none.

Much of the furniture and equipment (including typewriters) belonged to the executive branch and was on loan during the session. This area and most of the House offices were locked up during the long 18-month interim. In 1955 the Chief Clerk's Office was kept open year around for the first time in the state's history.

It is not my intent to criticize the system that was in place when I first came to work. Rather, I compliment the members who served in the old days for their efforts and accomplishments. My point is: it was difficult for the legislative branch in Minnesota, as in most other states in earlier years, to provide the facilities or gather public support to be a co-equal branch of government. But the Minnesota Legislature even then rated high when compared with other states; in fact, a national organization in the 1960's rated it as the 10th best in the nation. Minnesota's legislative branch has had a longstanding reputation for being caring, innovative and productive. You believe in self improvement. When I attend a national legislative meeting I'm proud to say "I'm from Minnesota."

Here is one statistic that will give you old timers some bragging rights: During the current 1989-90 two-year session 612 new laws were created. In the 1949 90-day session, without air-conditioning, without computers, and without private offices, 747 new laws were created.



Here's another compliment for the old-timers: you worked hard, very hard; you worked long, long hours; and you also knew how to throw a good party.

That's enough history for this time. Let's concentrate on the present. I have not forgotten why we are here today.

A word about the sculptor, Paul Theodore Granlund. I have spent some time with him in his studio at St. Peter and I have spent some time socially with Mr. Granlund and his family. I have seen some of his works of art and I now have a great deal of respect for his talents and his achievements. It is no wonder that he has gained prominence and that his works of art are in demand. Thank you, Mr. Granlund, for your patience with me. I am excited about the sculptural portrait and am very pleased that you are here today.

Let me conclude by again thanking all those who have helped me along the way: House staff who supported me, leadership who appointed or re-appointed me, friends who stuck with me when things were tough, family who wondered if I was ever going to amount to anything, Senate members and staff who have been cooperative and neighborly, and every one of the nearly 1,000 House members for whom I have worked. It's been fun - - - and I'd do it over again!

Thanks to you, Speaker Vanasek, and to all the committees for your efforts - - - and thanks to all of you for coming to this special occasion! I'll never, never forget this day!

Thank you!