

Independent-Republican . . .

Sviggum referees House minority caucus

For House Minority Leader Steve Sviggum, this is no time to put away his striped shirt nor his whistle.

In his decade-plus of refereeing high school football and basketball games, Sviggum has had to make thousands of quick decisions and break up more than a few disputes between overheated opponents.

Those weren't necessarily attributes he accented during his successful bid to lead the House Independent-Republican caucus, but they are skills that should serve him well as he grows into his new job.

"It might be a part of my personality," he said. "You get into the position of making judgment calls. Those are the calls I enjoy making on the basketball court and they are the ones I certainly enjoy making in the Legislature."

Shortly after the close of the 1992 session, Sviggum, 40, was chosen by House Republicans to serve as minority leader. After first gaining a House seat during the Independent-Republican surge of 1978, Sviggum quickly established himself inside and outside the IR caucus with his knowledge of state government.

During his 12-year tenure, the Kenyon farmer and teacher has been at the forefront of battles to hold down the growth in state spending, while championing alternative solutions to workers' compensation and property tax reform.

"Government in Minnesota shouldn't be different from any business or any job that's out there in the private sector right now," he said. "Every business and every job has to get more efficient and has to produce a better product for less cost. And if they don't do that, they're not meeting their competition."

"I think Minnesota government has to change its philosophy around from just increasing the price of the product, to making it better and less costly and more efficient," he said.

But Sviggum's caucus lacks the voting strength to pass laws to reflect these ideals. With just 48 members, working with the House DFL leadership is necessary.

"I think it's our job to cooperate and to

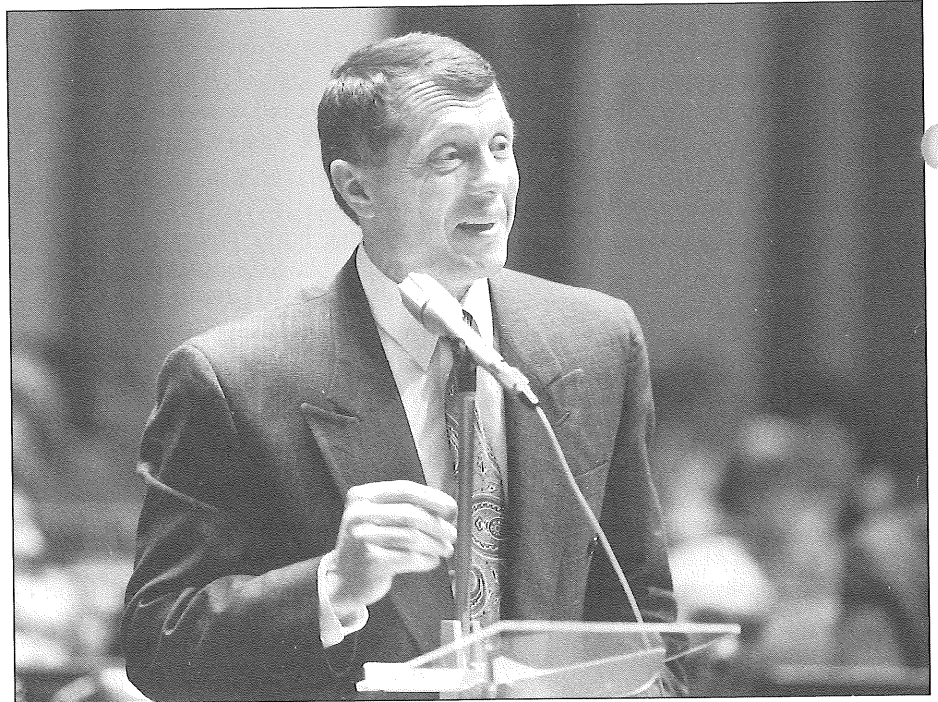
work together on various issues — which was done during the last session," Sviggum said. "But there are going to be certain times when we don't agree and that's when it's the role of the minority to present

third person in four years to hold the post. "There is a certain amount of burnout and it's a position that can be frustrating, simply because you never have the votes to do what you want to do."

House Independent-Republicans, however, do have a valuable ally in fellow IR Gov. Arne Carlson. The governor can wield considerable influence on legislation through vetoes and threats of vetoes, giving both Carlson and the minority caucus leverage.

"We intend to bring forth a unified message even though we recognize, at times, we may have differing opinions," he said.

Although they are certainly supportive of the direction Carlson is moving, Sviggum said House IRs should not be considered a rubber stamp for the governor's



House Minority Leader Steve Sviggum during a recent House floor session.

alternatives and options and be a bit confrontational. That's part of the process as well."

He calls the task "keeping the majority honest" and it's a role he said fits him well, despite the frustration and difficulties being minority leader can entail.

"People don't last long in minority leadership spots," he said, noting that he is the

proposals.

"He is going to feel one way about something and our caucus is going to feel another. That's going to happen in any relationship. But as long as we feel ownership with what the governor is doing and we feel an input into decisions he makes, we can empower one another to be real players in the legislative process."

— Dave Price