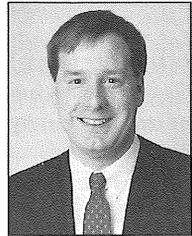


Gerlach hammers home plans to give taxes the ax

By Grant Martin

If Rep. Chris Gerlach (R-Apple Valley) ever runs for president, he can boast of actual experience with his finger on the button.



Rep. Chris Gerlach

Gerlach, who served as a captain in the Air Force from 1988 to 1993, commanded a nuclear missile crew in a control center in South Dakota.

“Actually, the myth is that it’s a button,” he said. “There are many buttons. But it’s actually a key.”

Gerlach and his crew worked 24-hour shifts in the underground, shock-resistant facility, where his team was responsible for upkeep and maintenance of both the control center and the nuclear missiles.

“Of course, the purpose of being there is that should you get the orders to launch, you decode the messages, you go through all the launch procedures, and you have a nuclear war,” he said.

Gerlach’s military career began during the cold war when the Soviet Union was referred to as the “evil empire,” and ended after the fall of the Iron Curtain. So he spent his last years in the Air Force actually deactivating nuclear weapons.

One of his favorite pastimes while in the service was participating in political discussions. He said there were good debates because officers in the military tend to be well-educated and politically knowledgeable.

“It’s also a very conservative group, so we often had to try to find some people to disagree with,” he said.

Gerlach currently lives in Apple Valley with his wife, Shelli. He works as a telecommunications sales representative.

The youngest in a family of six children, Gerlach grew up in the district he now serves. His parents moved into one of the first housing developments in Apple Valley.

Although his parents attended a few precinct caucuses, Gerlach said that his family wasn’t very political.

“Politics was never an issue in my family,” he said. “Nobody ever discussed politics.”

Gerlach stumbled into the political arena following several less-than-stellar grades in calculus at the University of St. Thomas. Realizing that his computer science ambitions wouldn’t become a reality, he started looking for a new major.

“I decided that I would jump ship on the computer science and switch over to political science, which I loved,” he said. “It was one of the best decisions I ever made.”

When he returned to Minnesota in 1993 following his service in the Air Force, Gerlach became active with several local political campaigns, including managing former Rep. Eileen Tompkins’ 1994 campaign for the House. And in 1996, he worked on Phil Gramm’s presidential campaign in Minnesota.

Gerlach said those experiences taught him a good deal about politics that wasn’t covered in the classroom.

“A great portion of it is about personalities and people,” he said. “The academic study of political science is devoid of that. To be successful in politics you have to understand people.”

When Tompkins decided not to run in 1998, Gerlach decided to run for her seat, and in November he won his first elected position.

Gerlach said he will focus on the issues that he “hammered on” during the campaign — crime, education, and, most importantly, taxes.

“The tax burden in Minnesota is outra-

geous at all levels — be it income tax, sales tax, property taxes. You name it,” he said.

Gerlach said that Minnesota ranks 17th in the nation in wages before taxes. After taxes are taken out, he said, the state ranks 43rd.

“To me, that’s outrageous,” he said.

To that end, Gerlach is a co-sponsor of a House Republican permanent income-tax reduction proposal. He is also a co-sponsor on a larger tax cut plan, which calls for a 1-percent across-the-board cut.

“If I was issued a magic wand when I got this office, I would wave it and do that,” he said.

Gerlach also said that the Legislature needs to curb its appetite on spending.

“It’s funny because you walk in and it says ‘No Solicitations,’” he said, referring to a sign on the front door of the State Office Building. “That’s all that goes on here. People are asking for money. This place is designed for that.”

Gerlach readily admits that he isn’t a “policy wonk.” He said that he realizes that his strengths lie in connecting people to the political process. And, he said, those skills are important for the Legislature.

“There is a handful of policy wonks, and there’s a handful of people people,” he said. “Altogether, collectively, it works.”

District 36A

1995 population: 38,400
Largest city: Apple Valley
County: Dakota
Location: south suburban metro
Top concern: “The biggest thing is tax cuts. All through the campaign I hammered on that. I think that was clearly a significant portion of why I won by the margin I did.”

— Rep. Chris Gerlach

Frequently called numbers

(Area code 651)

Secretary of the Senate
 231 Capitol 296-0271
 Voice mail/order bills 296-2343
Chief Clerk of the House
 211 Capitol 296-2314

Index, Senate
 110 Capitol 296-2887
Index, House
 211 Capitol 296-6646
Information, Senate
 231 Capitol 296-0504

Information, House
 175 State Office Building 296-2146
TTY, Senate 296-0250
 Toll free 1-888-234-1112
TTY, House 296-9896
 Toll free 1-800-657-3550