

# Smith ready to 'bang heads' with system

Although Steve Smith says he's not a career politician, his recent history has been marked by a snowballing commitment to public life.

It started, recalls Smith, with a one-term stint on the Mound City Council beginning in 1985. He then won two terms as mayor of Mound, serving from 1987 to 1990, before running for the state House when former representative John Burger retired.

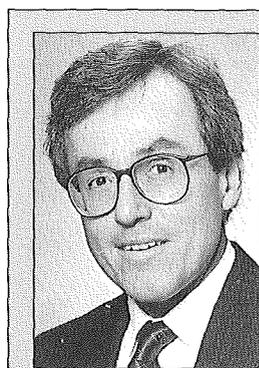
As with his original candidacy for city council, the motive behind Smith's House campaign was simple. "I got involved because I saw some things I didn't like and I wanted to try to change them," the IR lawmaker says.

The biggest of those concerns is property taxes.

"People [in District 43A] perceive property taxes as being out of control, that we are unfairly burdened in the west Hennepin, Lake Minnetonka area," he says.

He points to the state's complicated three-tier property tax system, coupled with ever-inflating real estate values, as the source of his constituent's unrest. Smith says his constituents are not only disturbed by the way property taxes are raised, but also in how they are distributed.

And although the spread of Eurasian



## Steve Smith

District 43A

Age: 41

Home: Mound

Occupation: Attorney

**District traits:** 43A includes the cities of Excelsior, Long Lake, Minnetonka Beach, Minnetrista, Mound, Orono, St. Bonifacius, Shorewood, Spring Park, and Tonka Bay. The district voted for Rudy Boschwitz over Paul Wellstone in the 1990 U.S. Senate election by a margin of 56.9-to-43.1 percent.

water milfoil and boating safety issues are not of paramount concern to a lot of Minnesotans, they are a very big topic in the district that includes Lake Minnetonka, he says.

In District 43A, where ten cities are arranged around a Lake Minnetonka centerpiece, Smith says the lake itself often is the big issue.

With his years of experience as a family law attorney and background in local government, Smith says he feels well-prepared to penetrate the Byzantine workings of state government.

Legal training, he says, taught him the mechanical basics: what a law is, and how it gets into the books. But working with the

law has given him more significant insights.

"You tend to know what laws work well, which ones don't, and maybe how they can be changed," he explains.

Smith sits on the Judiciary Committee, where he foresees an opportunity to work on some favorite legislation in the Family Law Subcommittee. Smith says one of his priorities — as a relatively new father of a two-year-old son, Ryan — is to strengthen private in-home day-care.

And Smith says he's ready to bang his head against the wall for those priorities.

"I've already had six years of banging my head against the wall with the city of Mound. I can tell you that oftentimes it hurts, but occasionally you succeed in doing something."

## Supreme Court okays legislative chaplains

That church and state should be separate is a basic tenet of American society. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution spells this out by prohibiting government from preferring one faith over another.

So how does Minnesota, not to mention many other states, get by allowing the Legislature to start its day with a prayer?

The simple answer is that's the way it's always been. And the U.S. Supreme Court upheld that position in its ruling on the Nebraska Legislature's chaplaincy program.

Ernest Chambers, a Nebraska legislator, sued the state arguing that his legislature's use of a chaplain — who is paid with public money — violated the U.S. Constitution.

A federal district court allowed the state to keep its chaplain, but took away his pay. The federal appeals court, however, banned the chaplain altogether.

But the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the appeals court's decision, saying history was on the side of the chaplain. Con-

gress, Chief Justice Warren Burger noted, had used chaplains for 200 years.

"To invoke Divine guidance on a public body entrusted with making laws is not, in these circumstances, an 'establishment' of religion or a step toward establishment," Burger wrote in the court's opinion. "It is simply a tolerable acknowledgment of beliefs widely held among the people of the country."

Justice John Paul Stevens, however, didn't agree. In a dissenting opinion, he questioned the open-mindedness of legislative chaplain programs.

"Prayers may be said by a Catholic priest in the Massachusetts Legislature," Stevens wrote, "and by a Presbyterian minister in the Nebraska Legislature, but I would not expect to find a Jehovah's Witness or a disciple of Mary Baker Eddy [founder of the Christian Science church] or the Reverend Moon serving as the official chaplain in any state legislature."