

Brainerd Daily Dispatch 4-3-06 (Also published on 4-1-06)

DFLers endorse three

Sluss wins first-ballot victory over Ringwelski

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BAXTER - District 12 DFLers endorsed three legislative candidates Saturday with Crow Wing County Commissioner and state Senate candidate Terry Sluss winning a first-ballot victory in the only contested race.

The 55-year-old Sluss defeated Jessica Ringwelski, 21, of rural Little Falls by a vote of 77-19. Sixty percent approval from the 100 delegates was needed for endorsement. Sluss polled more than 80 percent of the vote. The convention was conducted at the Lodge at Brainerd Lakes.

Winning unanimous endorsement for House District 12A and 12B seats were **John Ward** of Brainerd and Al Doty, 60, of Royalton.

Sluss said he appreciated the opportunity to represent the party and will ask for a leave of absence from his teaching position in the Brainerd School District to campaign full-time.

Before his endorsement Sluss said he wouldn't hesitate to represent local interests even if it went against the wishes of DFL leaders at the state Capitol. He pointed to his three successful elections to the county board as examples of his experience.

"All voices will be heard," he said, speaking of his campaign for the seat currently held by Sen. Paul Koering, R-Fort Ripley.

Both candidates had pledged to abide by the party endorsement.

Ringwelski said she wasn't disheartened by the loss and indicated she'd run for office again. She said she'll continue to be active in DFL politics.

"It's just another experience," the St. Cloud State University student said of her defeat.

Don Samuelson, a DFLer who served the district for years in both the House and Senate, said recently he still hadn't decided whether he would challenge the DFL Senate candidate in the primary. He said he may delay his decision until he can judge the strength of the state ticket and see who is at the top of the DFL ticket.

In a question-and-answer session, Sluss said the Legislature's shift in the tax system favored people who have second homes at the expense of others. He also criticized Minnesota Department of Transportation plans to make a two-lane stretch of Highway 371 a four-lane while mandating that Crow Wing County spend a substantial amount of money for accompanying improvements to affected intersections.

Sluss said he is pro-life from conception to death and expressed concern that the issue was such a divisive one. He said his stance was partly influenced by the loss of three brothers to suicide.

Ward, who won endorsement to the District 12A seat now held by Rep. Paul Gazelka, R-Brainerd, told delegates he had been raised to value public service and give back to the community. He said Gov. Rudy Perpich had been an inspiration to him in politics.

Five issues he emphasized to the delegates were education, health care, jobs, the environment and methamphetamine prevention.

Health care, he said, should be a right and not a privilege. He also promised to fight for living wage jobs.

"We are going to fight hard," the Brainerd School District teacher said. "The great thing about the DFL Party is that we can agree to disagree, but come together."

Doty, 60, won endorsement to the House 12B seat now held by Rep. Greg Blaine, R-Little Falls. He returned to the DFL Party after running for the same seat two years ago with the Independence Party. He said he had left the DFL Party because he felt both major parties had moved away from the center.

He criticized the Republican Party for cutting benefits of the most vulnerable people.

"The DFL is truly the party of the center," Doty said. "This is where the party belongs - in the center. The other side isn't in the center."

Speaking in support of Doty was Bob Keeton, the DFL-endorsed candidate for District 12B in 2004.

"It's hard to come back to old friends after you've been away for awhile," Doty said. "You made me welcome."

Doty is a senior advocate who previously was a teacher, wrestling coach and technology teacher for 31 years at Healy High School in Pierz. He grew up and worked on the family grain and beef farm in Campbell.

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