

Unhappy ending

Shoemaker feeling hurt as resignation nears

By Kitz Cleary
Menomonee News Bureau

© 1988 Leader-Telegram

MENOMONEE — State Sen. Richard Shoemaker's face can't disguise the hurt of his leaving a job he'd rather finish.

Shoemaker, D-Menomonie, makes no secret of the wounds he has suffered in the six-month ordeal that ends Monday when he formally resigns from the state Senate and is sentenced on five misdemeanor ethics and election-law violations.

Shoemaker, 38, pleaded guilty in August to receiving money from a lobbyist, failing to disclose an \$8,500 loan on three financial disclosure statements, defrauding his campaign committee of less than \$500, inflating a receipt from a fundraiser at a Madison restaurant, and using his public position to accept something of value for private benefit.

Shoemaker returned to the 16th Senate District Friday after spending his last week as a legislator in Madison. He is spending this weekend in the district saying farewell to longtime supporters.

"I'm not going to be around much," he said in an interview Friday with the Leader-Telegram in Menomonie. "I've got jail time to do. Some of these people have been supporters of mine for 15 years, and they're tough meetings. There is a lot

of hurt, a lot of pain."

As punishment for the violations, Shoemaker will leave his Senate seat and spend time in jail, while also facing a stack of legal and election debts. Shoemaker has agreed to serve 60 days in jail, but Dane County Circuit Court Judge Daniel Moeser will not be bound to that agreement at Monday's sentencing.

Uppermost in Shoemaker's mind now is concern for his family. He frets over how he can support them without a job, knowing that he is an untouchable in exactly those jobs he is most qualified to take. He figures it will be at least six months to a year before his taking a job will not provoke attacks from the Madison and Milwaukee press.

"I wouldn't wish on any of my colleagues, even the two who have been the hardest on me, Tom Loftus (D-Sun Prairie, 46th Assembly District) and Mac Davis (R-Waukesha, 11th Senate District). I wouldn't wish on their families what my family has gone through."

Many believe Shoemaker became too cozy with some legislative lobbyists. But Shoemaker says he was raised to believe that one didn't throw away friends. When friends where former legislators who become lobbyists, the ties of friendship don't rot, Shoemaker explained. The families grew close and relied upon one another for support.

"Real lobbying, unfixed by oil-con-

ceived. . . it's the media," he said with disgust.

While he had no kind words for the Madison and Milwaukee newspapers, he praised a range of people from Gov. Tommy Thompson to the editor of his hometown weekly, saying the editor's antipathy earned him at least three additional terms in the Legislature. Shoemaker was in the Assembly for 10 years before being elected to the Senate last year.

Even now, on the eve of his sentencing, Shoemaker says he is receiving letters of support at a ratio of 15 to every one letter of condemnation. There are even those who hold out the hope that he will somehow evade jail time, he said. But he rejects that notion.

"I expect to go to jail for 60 days at least," he said. In fact, he prefers jail time over five years' probation.

Shoemaker says one of the ironies of his situation is that he was convicted for what is accepted practice in 26 states. In those states, he says, candidates can't steal from their campaign committees because they own the assets. And you can't steal your own money.

He predicts that within three years the charges that forced his resignation will no longer be criminal.

See SHOEMAKER, Page 4A

Shoemaker critical of Wisconsin's ethics laws

● SHOEMAKER from Page 1

"If Dick Shoemaker were to redo the ethics laws, the only thing I would say is, 'do something you want, but report it. Let your constituents decide. As it is, I'm not being removed from office by my constituents. I am being removed by a procedure.'"

Under his plan, records of gifts and contributions would be open to voters to decide whether that behavior is acceptable or not, he says.

"I contend that every member of the Legislature has violated the ethics or lobby law either because they have done exactly as I did or because they went to receptions."

"As a rural legislator who cannot go home every night, Shoemaker argues that he and his outstate colleagues are held to stricter standards because they must stay in Madison.

Conversations continue over dinner or at a reception. Outstate legislators don't go home to supper, they eat at restaurants and other people sometimes pick up the tab.

"The one charge that I am leaving office on is the account that I had (lobbyist) Jim Hough set up at Namio's," Shoemaker said, referring to a Madison restaurant at which Shoemaker dined some 41 times, which added up to more than \$3,100 in food and beverage. Shoemaker charged to Hough's account between July 1985 and May 1988.

"That was wrong, we both knew it was wrong, there's no excuse for

"I am as remorseful as much as I could possibly be. I wish to apologize to my constituents and the greater constituents of this state, but it's over with now. And all I want now is to be a private citizen."

— Richard Shoemaker

it. It was wrong. And I'm leaving office because of it," Shoemaker said.

Shoemaker rejected blame on the other four charges. He said he didn't steal from his campaign committee; he didn't cause a false report to be filed; the loans from lobbyist Thomas Dohm were wrong but not sufficient to drive him from office; and he called the charge of an unreported loan from a Menomonee attorney silly.

The Hough charge deserved a guilty plea, Shoemaker said, but the other four charges deserved a no-contest plea, not a guilty plea. But under the terms of the agreement, Shoemaker said he had to accept the package or risk a felony charge.

The strain from the ordeal shows on Shoemaker's face. But he is looking beyond Monday. Somehow, he says, he is going to have to trim his eight-page resume to something more manageable. Then he will have to consider leaving his hometown as he seeks employ-

ment.

Despite his recent problems, Shoemaker says there are many positive things he will carry with him from his 10½-year legislative career.

The legislation he ranks at the top of his list is not the pari-mutuel and lobby law legislation that came out of his two terms as chairman of the Assembly State Affairs Committee. His proudest accomplishment is a remote piece of legislation that transformed the way town governments live.

Written in the summer of 1982, Shoemaker's committee rewrote Chapter 60 of the state law.

"We brought town government into the 21st century," as he put it. Under the new legislation, town governments could talk and work together. They no longer had situations like that in Marathon County, where one township paved and plowed the snow on its side of the road while an adjoining township left the other side in gravel and unplowed.

"People want me to say the lottery bill (is the most important), but if you look at something long term that I'll look back on in 20 years, I'll say that's the best work I did."

He also looks at the jawboning he did to pay the \$500,000 disaster debt from the infamous western Wisconsin windstorm of July 1980 as another badge of accomplishment.

He brought the disaster payments to the 29th Assembly District from Madison while he was still a young legislator. And, he says, it earned him at least one re-election and maybe two.

As Shoemaker drives home he sees evidence of his legislative work on the Building Commission. He helped win funding for the fieldhouse at the University of Wisconsin-Stout over "a solid prejudice against physical education facilities," he says.

As chairman of the Higher Education Subcommittee of the Building Commission, Shoemaker says he found himself besieged by chancellors' requests with the sole exception of Robert Swanson, former chancellor at UW-Stout.

Swanson was as likely to back a project for another campus as he was to lobby for his own. Shoemaker says he worked for buildings for all campuses that needed them, but he worked for the Madison campus most of all.

As he reflected on his years in the Legislature, Shoemaker recalled

teachers whose opinion he could trust, school superintendents who gave his proposals thought-provoking commentary and town officials he could count on for an honest call. He appreciated them all. That's what the meetings through the district are all about. He wants to say goodbye.

"The politics in Wisconsin is not Republican versus Democrat, it is and always will be urban versus rural. Outstate versus downstate," he said.

While knowing state government will continue on without him, Shoemaker says the bureaucrats and the lobbyists will now run freely over issues where he once held the line. The minimum-markup law is an example, he said.

Shoemaker views the minimum-markup law as a battle between big business and little business. Big merchants move into communities with merchandise priced below the minimum markup, and often marked at less than cost, driving small local retailers out of business.

After Monday, Shoemaker won't be fighting anymore legislative battles. Instead, he'll be trying to pay his legal bills and start anew. But even paying his attorney has become an issue.

After the plea agreement, Shoemaker acknowledged that he would be willing to accept money from lobbyist friends who wanted to help him pay his legal bills. That touched off another round of criticism from the media and some legislative colleagues.

"I am as remorseful as much as I could possibly be," Shoemaker said. "I wish to apologize to my constituents and the greater constituents of this state, but it's over with now. And all I want now is to be a private citizen."

"My ambitions now are really very basic. I want to provide for my family. I want to play golf. I am looking for anonymity."

● COLLEAGUES from Page 1

Lewis said that if Shoemaker had a weakness, it was that "he tended to try and move too fast."

"His ambition always seemed to be there at the forefront," Lewis

"If that meant taking on a tough issue, that's what Dick thought you were paid to do," he said.

Contrary to public belief, Lewis said, Shoemaker didn't ask for the lottery and pari-mutuel gambling bills to come through his committee.

didates, is uncertain.

Although ethics will likely become a big issue for Wisconsin voters in the 1990 election, voters won't identify Democratic candidates with Shoemaker's legal problems, Strohl said.

"Voters don't look at the party

because the end of that road is Chicago-style politics," Lewis said. "The process does work and that means clean government. People don't deserve anything less than clean government."

Hamilton understands the pain Shoemaker's family is enduring as

Lawmakers differ on ethics, lobby laws