

Peers say senator worked hard

By Dan Holtz
Leader-Telegram staff.

Current and former colleagues of outgoing state Sen. Richard Shoemaker say he was a hard-working legislator, fiercely devoted to the issues he believed in and who also had a burning desire to see how far he could rise in politics.

Shoemaker, D-Menomonie, has agreed to resign his 10th District Senate seat when he is sentenced in Dane County Circuit Court on Monday for five misdemeanor convictions relating to Wisconsin's lobby and campaign finance laws.

"Shoemaker was 'an active, hardworking legislator never afraid to get involved in tough issues,'" said Senate Majority Leader Joseph Strohl, D-Racine. "In the Legislature, there are show horses and work horses. Dick was one of the work horses."

"He's always been effective in bringing

home the bacon" during the state budget process every two years, Strohl said. "He fought for his district."

Shoemaker was a "savvy legislator," according to Mark Lewis of Eau Claire, a former Democratic state representative who has known Shoemaker since 1978.

Shoemaker and Lewis frequently shared rides to the state Capitol in Madison.

"He knew how to get things done," Lewis said. "He was very hard working and very tough. Dick was someone you wanted to be on the same side of an issue with."

State Rep. Leo Hamilton, D-Chippewa Falls, said Shoemaker "was very forceful in what he tried to do and was most of the time successful."

Shoemaker, 38, lost his first attempt at public office in a 1974 Assembly race. He tried again in 1978 and won. He served the 29th Assembly District in the state Legislature for 10 years before winning the 10th Senate District election last November.

Shoemaker obtained a high profile during his years in the Assembly as chairman of the State Affairs Committee and twice just missed becoming the Assembly's majority leader.

Shoemaker was elected Assembly assistant majority leader in 1983 and lost races for majority leader by one vote in both 1985 and 1987. The losses hurt because Assembly majority leader was the one job Shoemaker wanted in Madison.

State Rep. Al Baldus, D-Menomonie, the man who got Shoemaker started in politics in the mid-1970s, said those leadership losses took some of the fire out of Shoemaker.

"That kind of dampened his ability to move up," Baldus said.

Shoemaker worked on Baldus' staff when Baldus represented Wisconsin's 3rd District in Congress from 1975-80.

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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 said. "That isn't necessarily bad, but he seemed to get caught up in his ambitions at times."

Hamilton said Shoemaker also may have been too arrogant on occasion.

"He just felt that he knew his way around better than anyone else did," Hamilton said. "But I can't say that was a weakness."

"I enjoy public service," Shoemaker said during a 1987 interview. "It's my mistress."

Because of its non-descript title, the Assembly State Affairs Committee can deal with almost any type of bill. High-profile bills, such as those dealing with the drinking age and legalized gambling, passed through Shoemaker's committee.

Shoemaker accepted the tough issues because they came with the territory of being an elected official, Lewis said.

"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.

"A lot of issues used to come to Dick Shoemaker because the leadership in the Assembly felt he could handle them," Lewis said. "They tossed him a lot of tough issues that others didn't want."

Strohl said Shoemaker never got rolling in the Senate as he did in the Assembly because of the lobby and ethics investigation and because he basically had to start over as a freshman senator.

"He had this cloud hanging over him, and he wasn't able to pick right up where he left off in the Assembly," Strohl said. "You just don't give a freshman the kind of committee assignments their prior service may warrant."

What effect Shoemaker's legal problems will have on the legislative process and future elections, particularly for Democratic can-

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 label," he said. "They look at the individual candidates."

State Sen. Marvin Roshell, D-Chippewa Falls, doesn't believe Shoemaker's troubles will hurt the Legislature.

"Each individual is a case on its own," he said. "It doesn't reflect the whole body down there."

Hamilton believes the Shoemaker case, along with the lesser lobby and ethics penalties levied against other legislators during the past year, will lead to changes in Wisconsin's lobby and ethics laws.

Lewis hopes no changes are made.

"We have tough lobby laws in Wisconsin and rightly so," he said. "The laws are easy to understand, and all legislators know them."

Changing the laws are "a road Wisconsin shouldn't travel down

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 the result of his legal problems but hopes a silver lining emerges for the Legislature.

"If any good comes of this, it will make people aware of just how strict the rules are under which we operate," he said.



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