

Lawmakers preparing for new role

Aldermen on different paths to same end — the Capitol

By Scott Williams
Of The Examiner

BLUE SPRINGS — To understand why Carson Ross and Bruce Dotson have different views of their new roles in the Missouri House of Representatives, it is necessary to recall how each got where he is today.

The two Blue Springs aldermen charted starkly contrasting courses from City Hall to statehouse this year. And the sort of campaign each won seems to be shaping his perspective on becoming a state lawmaker.

One confidently brash and the other unassumingly demure, the new legislative duo of Blue Springs apparently goes to Jefferson City with somewhat of a split personality.

Those who know them well would say that Ross has always been resolute in his ambitions and that Dotson has been deferential and soft-spoken by comparison.

The way each won his biggest political victory might have changed that perception, but, for better or for worse, that does not appear to have happened.

Ross captured the open 49th District convincingly, prevailing in both the primary and general election. The general election was a hard-fought contest won by a resounding margin of 2,300 votes.

Now self-assured that he is supported by a clear majority of his new constituents, the 41-year-old Ross is undaunted in articulating his dreams for his first term in the House.

"You expect a person going out in his freshman year to kind of just get a basic orientation," he says, "and yet I hope to go beyond that and actually make a difference in the process and contribute to the overall process — as a leader."

Dotson, on the other hand, barely survived his second attempt to unseat 54th District incumbent Glenn Binger. The young challenger eked out victory in the winner-take-all August primary by just 20 votes.

Clearly unable to claim the same mandate as Ross, the 31-year-old Dotson is comparatively modest in assessing the potential for his first term.

"You pick up pretty quickly, but there are a lot of fine-tuning things that you have to ac-

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quire. And that does take time," he says. "The first year is going to be a learning experience."

Ross and Dotson's successful campaigns also gave them a keen understanding of the political importance of achieving positions of leadership within the state government.

Both their campaigns this year turned on questions of whether Eastern Jackson County would be represented by legislative lightweights or heavyweights.

In the November election, Ross faced an opponent with three previous terms in the House and a virtual lock on a committee chairmanship if returned to Jefferson City by the 49th District.

That battle behind him, Ross is quite certain that he, too, will wield influence over other legislators, even as a freshman.



Dotson: 'The first year is going to be a learning experience.'

"I think they're going to look to me for input in a lot of different areas," he says. "And I'm looking forward to providing that type of leadership. I'm not one to just stand back and follow."

In fact, he adds: "I told them that, since I'm a freshman, I didn't seek out any leadership roles this time. But next time, I will."

Dotson, who succeeded in painting Binger as one who either failed to use his clout or used it unwisely, is also more reserved than Ross in predicting when he might step to forefront.

"Of course it won't happen in two years, but hopefully I will be able to get myself into a position where at least I'm working my way up towards a chairmanship," he says.

For their committee assignments, the two freshman lawmakers again have chosen

divergent paths, although each has specific ideas that correspond with their requested committees.

During his campaign, Ross offered voters a list of five policy objectives, calling for improvements in education, local government, drug enforcement, economic development and quality of life.

Accordingly, he has requested assignment to the following committees: Higher Education, Local Government, Civil and Criminal Justice, Traffic and Motor Vehicle Regulations, and Public Health and Safety.

A couple of his early legislative ideas would increase state subsidies for qualified college students and make it easier for senior citizens to acquire Medicare for nursing home or other housing.