

Prog leader offers an alternative voice

By Nancy Remsen

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MONTPELIER — It's easy to pick out the lead spokesman for the six-member Progressive Party caucus in the House. He's the guy with the long brown ponytail in the sea of gray-haired buzz cuts.

Each January for the last eight years, Rep. David Zuckerman, 32, of Burlington has swapped his farm overalls and a dawn-to-dusk routine on his 16-acre, leased organic vegetable and fruit farm in the Intervale for dark business suits and equally long days in the Statehouse.

This year Zuckerman will be the senior Progressive legislator in a caucus whose majority now comes from districts outside of the party's original Burlington base.

Zuckerman has mixed farming and politics since he left his childhood home in Brookline, Mass., to attend the University of Vermont in



David Zuckerman

1989. He brings a strong work ethic and a sense of humor to both jobs, according to Rep. Mitzi Johnson, D-South Hero, a UVM classmate who has worked side-by-side with Zuckerman in the fields and in the halls of the Statehouse.

"He takes his work very seriously," said Johnson. "He takes himself very lightly."

Zuckerman spent years doing the political spade work needed to nurture broad legislative support for the medical

marijuana law that finally was passed last year. He also worked over several sessions to secure labeling of genetically modified seeds.

"He is tenacious," said new House Democratic Leader Carolyn Partridge, who served with Zuckerman on the House Agriculture Committee. "He won't give up."

Broadening the spectrum of views that lawmakers consider on issues is the role Zuckerman sees for himself and the rest of the tiny Progressive caucus.

"While being small and having less power by numbers, we also have a liberty," Zuckerman explained. Members of the two larger caucuses will be under some pressure to "toe the party line," he suggested. "There is an obligation on our part to speak up for Vermonters who often don't have a voice at the Statehouse."

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