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Former Duluthian Michael Paymar to end legislative career

A passion for combating domestic violence that began in Duluth now is leading state Rep. Michael Paymar to end his political career at the end of the current term.

Written By: John Lundy | 12:00 am, Nov. 27, 2013

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A passion for combating domestic violence that began in Duluth now is leading state Rep. Michael Paymar to end his political career at the end of the current term.

"I have this film, I have these books, I have all of these opportunities to work nationally and internationally on this topic," said Paymar, DFL-St. Paul. "Whenever the Legislature was in session it was difficult to accept invitations to go places."

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Paymar announced recently that he won't seek re-election to his House seat next fall, meaning his legislative career will end after 18 years.

Paymar, 59, founded the nonprofit Education for Critical Thinking two years ago with the goal of "challenging community institutions to end men's violence against women."

For Paymar, that goal dates back to 1981 when he was one of a group of men Ellen Pence invited to work with men who were being detained under new mandatory arrest policies for domestic violence.

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"I was not planning on a career in this (domestic violence) field," said Paymar, whose training was in education.

"I found the work interesting," Paymar recalled. "And then Ellen and I really hit it off as colleagues."

Pence, who died in January 2012, and Paymar went on to write what became the most widely used curriculum for domestic abuse offenders in the country, he said. They were co-writers of the book "Education Groups for Men who Batter: The Duluth Model" and co-producers of the documentary "With Impunity," which won a regional Emmy award.

Paymar retired from the Battered Women's Justice Project, which is associated with the Domestic Abuse Intervention Program, just last year. He said he has been devoting much of his time to work on two books related to domestic violence that will be published next year.

Paymar grew up in Duluth's Hunters Park neighborhood and graduated from Duluth East High School. He has a bachelor's degree in education and history from the College of St. Scholastica and a master's degree in public administration from Hamline University.

He was elected to the Duluth City Council in 1981 and served eight years. He ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 1987.

After moving to St. Paul, Paymar stayed active politically and was first elected to the state Legislature in 1996. As chairman of the Public Safety Committee, he championed a bill this year that would have extended background checks to purchasers of guns at gun shows, over the Internet and in private sales. To his disappointment, the legislation did not get a vote on the House floor.

"It was a tense year for me," Paymar said, but the battle over gun issues had nothing to do with his decision not to seek re-election next year.

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