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Silverstein tries to give '100 percent'

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SPRINGFIELD — When Sen. Ira I. Silverstein does something, he doesn't skimp when it comes to putting in the effort.

Whether it's pushing a bill in the General Assembly, handling a case for a client at his law firm, making time for his family or following his faith as an Orthodox Jew, Silverstein said, "I give it 100 percent."

And those who have worked with the Democrat from Chicago's Far North Side over his 12-year career in the Senate couldn't agree more.

"Ira is not a show horse," said Dave Sullivan, a former lawmaker turned lobbyist. "He's a work horse. He puts his nose to grindstone and gets the job done, no matter what it is."

Sullivan has known Silverstein for more than a decade. They were members of the same freshmen class of lawmakers and now Sullivan lobbies his former colleague as the president of Raucci & Sullivan Strategies LLC.

"Ira has always been a terrific legislator to work with because he's smart and he's insightful and he understands the politics," Sullivan said. "You always get a straight shot from Ira. He does his job very well."

Sullivan said he is impressed by Silverstein's devotion to wife, Debra, who was elected earlier this year to represent Chicago's 50th Ward as an alderman and their four children as well as to his faith as an Orthodox Jew.

"It's great to see a faith-filled, family man be so successful in so many ways," Sullivan said. "I think it's rejuvenating and reassuring to the public to have someone like that representing them."

Silverstein, 50, said his faith is very important to him. For instance, if he has to come down to Springfield for work and the session happens to fall on the Sabbath, which for Jewish people is Saturday, Silverstein said he won't use technology because Orthodox Jews are forbidden from doing so on the Sabbath.

Following his faith forced him to preside over a Senate Executive Committee a few years ago without a microphone. It's also left him unable to pick up his phone or push his electronic voting button to cast his floor vote on the occasions that session falls on the Sabbath.

Silverstein said he brings his own Kosher food to Springfield and must remember to leave



Ira I. Silverstein
Illinois Senator
8th District (Chicago)

Age: 50.

Party: Democratic.

Years Served: 1999 to present.

Committees: Executive (vice chairman), Environment (chairman), Financial Institutions, Gaming (vice chairman), Insurance and Judiciary (all committee assignments were for this past legislative session).

Law school: The John Marshall Law School, 1985.

Interests: Spending time with his wife, Debra, alderwoman of Chicago's 50th Ward, and their four children.

before sundown during the winter months, something he says his colleagues remind him about when work is running late.

While Silverstein's dedication to his Jewish

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faith is obvious to many of his colleagues, it became even more evident this past legislation session, when a gun advocacy group used the gold Star of David in its newsletter.

The group used the Star of David in a way that Silverstein said attempted to compare Attorney General Lisa M. Madigan's decision that required state police to release the names of Firearm Owner Identification (FOID) cards to Nazi Germany's identification of Jewish people during the Holocaust.

"I spoke out right away," Silverstein said of the incident that led him to call on the group to issue an apology. "If I see something that's not right, I think it's very important to say something."

After sitting next to Silverstein in the Senate for several years, Sen. John M. Sullivan, D-Quincy, has become very familiar with his colleague's faith.

"I wasn't very familiar with his faith, but I'm an inquisitive guy so I asked a lot of questions," Sullivan said, adding that after

expressing an interest to learn more, Silverstein brought him one of those "books for dummies" on the Jewish faith.

He said he's learned a lot from Silverstein over the years and not all of the lessons are about his faith.

"Ira has taught me about the city," Sullivan said. "He's from the city and I'm from a very rural, agricultural district. We are kind of an odd couple, but we get a long very well and help each other understand legislation from each other's perspectives."

Sullivan, the lawmaker, said Silverstein has also taught him how important it is to serve his constituents.

"Ira works very hard for his constituents. He's very cognizant of what they need and want," Sullivan said. "He has always said, as well as others, to vote your district because those are the people that elected you to office. They are the ones you are representing. It's really sound advice and I think Ira believes that more than anyone."

In his 12 years in the Senate, Silverstein

said he has made consumer issues a top priority. After all, helping people is the reason why Silverstein, a 1985 graduate of The John Marshall Law School, said he decided to run for office.

Silverstein said he is proud of his work on measures dealing with cyber bullying, sexting and hate crimes. And as a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee and a longtime private practitioner in Chicago, Silverstein has also proposed several bills to benefit the legal community.

For the past few years, Silverstein has pushed a bill that would require the Illinois State Board of Elections to remove the addresses of judges from election paperwork once the objection period ends. It didn't survive this legislation session, but he plans to reintroduce it next year.

In the meantime, Silverstein said he plans to enjoy spending time with his family this summer. He also said he was looking forward to accompanying Gov. Patrick J. Quinn on a trip to Israel. He was expected to arrive there today.