

REPRESENTATIVE ON THE RUN

By Tom Nugent



Ask freshman congressman Ed Perlmutter (DistSt75, Law78) what it's like to land on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., as a brand-new member of the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Colorado Democrat will startle you with his reply.

"The first thing I learned when I arrived here last January was that you better be in top physical shape," says the recently elected representative from suburban Denver's 7th Congressional District. "Really, I don't think I've ever done so much walking before.

"Somebody gave me a pedometer right before I came to Congress. So I hooked it up and, during the first three months of the session, I was walking at least six miles per day. There have been many days in which I covered 10 miles — and a lot of that was running.

"I'm not quite sure how effective I've been as a lawmaker so far," he jokes, "but after three months I can tell you one thing — I'm now in the best condition of my entire life!"

For Perlmutter, the former Colorado state senator who last year won a narrow primary victory over several Democratic rivals and then defeated a Republican opponent to claim the seat of outgoing GOP Rep. Bob Beauprez (PE'70), life on the Hill has so far proved to be a grinding, 16-hour-a-day marathon.

An affable politician with a knack for connecting with hard-working, middle-class families (he gained widespread fame in recent years as coach of a Denver-area girls softball team), the indefatigable Golden resident clearly capitalized on the growing disenchantment over the course of President Bush's Iraq War. Accompanied by 30 other freshman Democrats (who now rule the House by a majority of 233-202), Perlmutter suddenly found himself packing for his new life as a neophyte legislator in the nation's capital.

Then there's the daily battle involved in managing a dozen employees and a \$1.5 million annual office budget — to say nothing of deciding how to vote on immensely complicated issues such as international tariffs and foreign policy.

So what's it like to wake up each morning in a "too-expensive" apartment a few blocks from the Hill and make a mad dash toward the first leg of what will be a daylong endurance race between committee hearings, tense caucus huddles, hurried votes on the floor and seemingly endless meetings with Denver-area constituents? You'll hear words like demanding, exacting, formidable and humbling, along with another word he often uses to summarize his experience: — thrilling.



