

Stang stays close to constituents, rural concerns

Rep. Doug Stang (R-Cold Spring) is used to questions about his age. He heard them on the campaign trail, and he's hearing them in his early days as a member of the House.



Rep. Doug Stang

The 22-year-old is the youngest member of the 1997 Legislature, but it's a distinction he seems to pay little mind.

"Someone has to be youngest, and I guess I'm that person," he said. "In my district, this is really nothing unusual.

Our area has a history of sending young legislators down here to St. Paul."

In fact, the region around Stang's hometown has elected several relatively youthful state lawmakers. District 14B also claims the youngest member of the Minnesota Senate, Sen. Michelle Fischbach (R-Paynesville), 31.

A recent graduate of St. John's University, Stang's political education got a boost in 1995 when he served as a clerk for the Senate Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, then chaired by Sen. Joe Bertram of Paynesville.

"Working in the Senate in 1995 gave me an idea of what exactly it takes to be a legislator and what you need to do," Stang said. "At that point, my interest in running for office grew."

Stang once stood up at a party for Bertram staffers and joked that he wasn't sure who he might someday unseat, Joe Bertram or his brother Jeff Bertram, then a member of the House.

Within a short period of time, Stang made a bid for each of the seats once held by the Bertrams.

After Joe Bertram resigned in 1995, Stang declared his candidacy for the Senate seat, but lost in the Republican primary to Fischbach.

Stang got another chance at the Legislature when Jeff Bertram announced that he would not seek re-election in 1996. This time Stang had better luck. He defeated Paynesville Mayor Joe Voss in the November general election.

Stang built his campaign around his promise to better mirror his district's values. Those values, according to Stang, center on a strong work ethic and a commitment to family.

He also plans to support a fiscally conservative agenda focusing on issues such as continued reform of the welfare system and cautious use of the forecast budget surplus.

Stang sees a golden opportunity for the state to make effective welfare system changes in the wake of last year's federal overhaul.

"There's such a strong public uproar against the current system," Stang said. "Now more than ever we have the public support to make the changes and to shift toward getting people back into the workplace."

He is taking a cautious approach to any proposal that calls for dipping into the surplus in state funds, which is forecast to reach \$1.4 billion.

"I don't like the idea of spending that money," Stang said. "If the additional revenue is there, I would like to see it spent on education if we're going to spend it on anything."

Improving public education was another theme of Stang's campaign and it is something he intends to concentrate on as a legislator.

He would like to see the state pick up a

larger share of the education spending tab to reduce the current reliance on local property taxes. And Stang has joined a chorus of legislators calling for repeal of education spending caps enacted in 1995 that would result in significant cutbacks over the next two years.

He also is among the many lawmakers who are opposed to public funding for a new baseball stadium.

"People love the Twins out in rural areas, but those people understand what their priorities are and the Legislature needs to understand those priorities as well," Stang said.

Those down-home priorities seem to be Stang's guiding force in his early days in the House, and he promises that age will not hold him back.

"The main thing is you have to earn the respect of your colleagues," Stang said. "The way you do that is by respecting them and respecting the experience that they have. That's what I've been doing, and that's what I will continue to do."

—Nick Healy

District 14B

1996 population: 36,096

Largest city: Cold Spring

Counties: Stearns, Pope

Location: central Minnesota

Top concern: "The people who live in my district have a very strong work ethic and they're very family oriented. They want to see those values incorporated into the work we do in the Legislature. I want to carry those values forward, and I want to give my district honest, open-minded representation."

—Rep. Doug Stang

Lawmakers discussed streaking and got a firsthand look at their subject matter during one unusual day in 1974.

The *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, on March 14, 1974, reported that lawmakers debated a "streaking amendment" to an unrelated bill the previous day and that "nude male streakers" made their Capitol complex debut.

The tongue-in-cheek amendment, offered by Rep. Neil Haugerud (DFL-Preston), defined a streaker as "one who moves at a high speed, but not to

Do you know?

exceed 55 miles an hour" — a sarcastic reference to the freshly established 55 mph speed limit.

The amendment also called for a \$2 registration fee for streakers and a special tax on ski masks and sneakers. And the proposal included a requirement that "night streakers" be equipped with a light on the front and a red reflector on the rear, according to the *Post-Bulletin*.

Lawmakers had some fun with the proposed amendment. One suggested that streakers in the Senate be required to wear a coat and necktie — a jab at the upper body's dress code.

The amendment never came up for a vote, but events that followed left some wondering if it should have. Moments after the proposal was dropped, three streakers scurried past the House chamber entrance.