

# On the homefront

## After years of promoting Minnesota around the world, Magnus turns attentions to more local concerns

By MIRANDA BRYANT

A quick glance at Rep. Doug Magnus' (R-Slayton) background and one would think that St. Paul is too small a town for this guy.



Rep. Doug Magnus

He's been to more than 30 countries, some of them several times.

The freshman Republican has traveled the globe for the United Soybean Board, a group dedicated to increasing the number of U.S. soybean food products on

more plates in more countries. As such, Magnus has met with leaders in communist China, lobbied members of the European Union, and brokered deals with government ministers in Moscow.

But his home, his family, and his business are in a small town. Magnus was born in Slayton, where he continues to grow corn and soybeans and feed cattle with his son, father, and cousin.

Magnus began thinking about running for the Minnesota House of Representatives last spring.

"I just wasn't happy with what was going on," said Magnus. "The budget problems of course were No. 1. We in southwest Minnesota were getting left behind, I thought. And you can't solve (the state's problems) in the coffee shops."

Don Nickel, who succeeded Magnus as vice president of international marketing for the national United Soybean Board, said Magnus makes for an excellent legislator.

"He has done a very good job of promoting soybeans, specifically Minnesota soybeans," said Nickel, who traveled on trade missions with Magnus to China, Europe, and Turkey. "He is very concerned about agriculture, specifically in Minnesota."

Magnus' international experience, which began when he was in the Vietnam War, may serve him well as a legislator. He's been assigned to four committees: taxes, agriculture

and rural development finance, agriculture policy, and transportation finance.

Regarding tax issues, Magnus is sponsoring a bill (HF3) on tax-free zones that Gov. Tim Pawlenty pitched the past two years as a state representative. Legislation presented in 2002 would have created up to 10 tax-free zones throughout the state to stimulate economic development beyond the Twin Cities. It would have also created similar zones for five agricultural processing facilities.

Under the 2003 plan, businesses in designated areas can forgo sales, income, and

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property taxes for up to 12 years. Individuals living in the areas wouldn't pay property or individual incomes taxes. And investors of tax-free zone ventures are exempt on business income and capital gains taxes on relative investments. Michigan and Pennsylvania have each created 5,000 new jobs through similar programs, said Magnus.

Creating rural jobs is necessary because not everyone in Minnesota can live in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, Magnus said, noting that by 2015 another 1 million people are expected to move to the area. Expanding metropolitan populations place a strain on hospitals, schools, churches, and businesses while leaving outlying areas to die, he said.

Magnus can cite many examples of businesses moving from his corner of Minnesota to neighboring South Dakota. One is Luverne Bumper, which employed 80 people, and was successfully courted by Brandon, S.D. Now it has more than 300 employees in a new plant.

"Luverne Bumper ought to be in Luverne, Minn., but you can't blame them," Magnus said.

Tax-free zone legislation will work well in the four counties Magnus represents, he said. For example, Murray County, where he resides, has been losing about 1 percent of its population annually for the past 20 years. And the income disparity between rural and urban areas is growing. In 1996 the annual per capita income was 70 percent of that in the Twin Cities, he said. Three years later it had fallen to 63 percent.

While the transportation committee may not seem an obvious assignment for a farmer, Magnus already has ideas. Exporting Minnesota's agricultural products to foreign markets demands a healthy infrastructure system. With China as the largest international consumer of U.S. soybeans and with Minnesota the third largest soybean producer, efficient transport to the Pacific Northwest for overseas shipment is critical.

An improved infrastructure is key in

competing with Argentina and Brazil. Considered the two biggest international agricultural competitors, they are spending billions on infrastructure, said Magnus.

With a goal of keeping Minnesota agriculture in the forefront, Magnus advocates continued international trade missions, such as the venture to Japan he took in 1999 with then-Gov. Jesse Ventura. And, trade teams should continue to be invited to Minnesota.

Said Magnus, "Personal relationships are key and those buyers want to see the farmers."

### DISTRICT 22A

**2002 population:** 36,438

**Largest cities:** Luverne, Pipestone

**Counties:** Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Rock

**Location:** southwest Minnesota

**Top concern:** "We realize that for Minnesota to move forward, we have to have a healthy rural Minnesota."

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