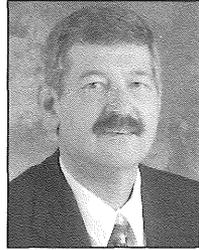


A new challenge

After more than two decades in local government, Simpson sees move to state level as the next logical step

By PATTY JANOVEC

For Rep. Dean Simpson (R-New York Mills), his decision to run for office was part commitment to public service and part love of policy dialogue.



Rep. Dean Simpson

As mayor of New York Mills for 25 years, Simpson said he gained plenty of experience, not to mention what he learned by owning and operating two grocery stores in the area.

He started the businesses from the ground up with no staff, and he says he now employs between 75 and 100 people.

He first considered running for the position when the former representative for his district, Roxann Daggett, asked if he'd be interested in the House seat. With his children grown and out of school, Simpson said he felt it was his next step in the process of public service.

"I have the look of a rural person with a strong business background," he said. With experience in maintaining a good-sized payroll, developing advertising, and living in rural area, he says he knows what it takes to be successful. And he said he believes those same skills will help in the decision-making process of representing his district.

Allan Berube, Simpson's campaign treasurer, said that Simpson "takes an active role," when working with people. "He's always asked 'What can we do as a team?'" The two have been friends for years and are cabin neighbors.

At one point while Simpson was mayor, the city looked to upgrade its park equipment. Berube explained how Simpson took initiative in the project, getting developers and financiers in place. "He started the ball rolling in getting donations." Along with parks, Simpson also supported efforts to build more apartments in the city. Again, Berube said, Simpson's initiative was at the forefront, saying "He's able to look at issues in a broad sense."

Simpson says his district consists of 14 towns ranging in population from 100 to 5,000. While the district has concerns of a small community, big businesses such as Lund, a boat producer, employ many residents. "We have a lot of excellent manufacturing companies out there, but a lot of products are hauled in," he said. Because of that, Simpson said, he looks forward to making sure the district continues to have access to roadways.

"Economic development is a huge issue, with the struggling of the farm economy it's just making it harder and harder," he said.

Otter Tail County was one of the leading dairy producers in the state, but the industry

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— Rep. Dean Simpson

is downsizing so rapidly that the district needs to provide other ways of employing people, Simpson said. "We have to create jobs for those people, those people have children, those children go to school, we need to maintain our school systems," he said. "Declining enrollment is an issue throughout the state."

He also said the small farmers use the services and goods in the community to supply their farms. On the other hand the big manufacturers in the district tend to bring in semi loads of goods "from whomever, wherever" to fulfill their needs. "The downturn is hard on a small community," he said.

On a state level, Simpson said, you can't control prices in such a global market. But the state can keep tax rates at a competitive edge for farmers, and develop other sources of income like ethanol and biomass products. "Whether it's less dependency on foreign oil, whether it's wind power on our farms, homegrown products we need to promote," he said.

Simpson says he's interested in learning more about the tax-free zones the governor has proposed to promote development. He said the area is expected to grow from 55,000 to 80,000 people in the next 10 years, and most of them will be retiring in the area. "We're seeing a tremendous amount of growth in our lakes, and we want to make sure we meet water quality, and provide the quality of life for the people."

Like all first-year legislators, Simpson got a taste of a tough issue early when members began the session with intense discussions in hopes of hammering out the first round of budget cuts. "As a freshmen the whole process is exciting. I was amazed at how fast the process started."

Looking ahead to the budget resolution for the next biennium, Simpson said, "I have to believe with the help of the outstate legislators, that we're going to get through this budget proposal and make strong commitments to rural Minnesota."

Admittedly not happy about the cuts to ethanol, Simpson said the governor did what he had to do and respects him for that. However, in moving forward with the next round of budget cuts, Simpson said he and other Greater Minnesota representatives will have to work hard to give their communities a voice and help maintain long-term viability.

DISTRICT 10B

2002 population: 36,552

Largest city: Wadena

Counties: Becker, Otter Tail, Wadena

Location: west-central Minnesota

Top concern: "Creating jobs in rural areas is my top issue."

— Rep. Dean Simpson