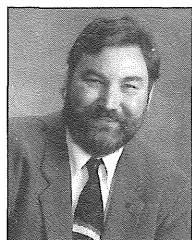


Skoe brings rural perspective to state policymaking

By Jon Fure

Rep. Rod Skoe (DFL-Clearbrook) attributes his success in the 1998 election to his diverse background, but it probably didn't hurt that as a farmer he grows two of the main ingredients in any Minnesota hot dish — wild rice and potatoes.



Rep. Rod Skoe

Skoe said the sparse population in District 2B consists of people with many different interests. Family farms can be found throughout the district, and logging is the main industry on the district's eastern edge, which is near the northwestern corner of the state. The district contains two American Indian reservations, and it attracts tourists to the Itasca State Park area.

Before he started farming with his father and uncles in 1985, Skoe worked in the logging industry. He has served as a Clearwater County commissioner and as a member of his local commodities council and school board.

"My background in logging and then farming, and my work with the school board and other committees makes me uniquely prepared to represent this diverse district," he said.

Skoe's wife, Sarah Hoagberg, is a former teacher who now works with the local school district in early childhood education and has worked with HeadStart and other programs. They have two children in junior high school — Mary, who has a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, and Patrick, who is active in many team sports.

Serving as a representative means he has less

time to spend with his family, but Skoe said it's a worthwhile sacrifice. He said his parents were always active in the community when he was growing up, and he credits them for being good role models.

"The only reason to do this is to make a commitment to do something positive for the area you live in," he said.

Life in St. Paul is quite a bit different than in Skoe's hometown, which has a population of about 680. But while Skoe has spent most of his life in his district, having grown up in Kelliher, Minn., big city life isn't completely foreign to him. He earned undergraduate degrees in psychology and sociology from Augsburg College in Minneapolis. His education is a little unusual for a farmer, but Skoe said it has helped him in many ways.

"I tell people I study plant populations instead of people populations," he said. "Actually, farming is a lot more than understanding the numbers. It's a business, and you have to be able to deal with people. And it's helped on the boards I've been on. You have to affect the board so that it makes good decisions."

As a county commissioner, Skoe's perspective helped influence decisions surrounding the newly formed Clearbrook Economic Development Board, which aims to grow jobs for rural residents. The board includes representatives from all of the local cities and school districts, some townships, and quite a few businesses.

As a legislator, he hopes to advocate continued crop research at the University of Minnesota, which he believes will help boost the economy throughout the state. Some of the

farms in his district have some not-so-traditional livestock — such as ostrich, emu, and buffalo — that could benefit from continued research.

"Soybeans were an experimental crop in the 1950s, and now (they are) a major crop," he said. "You can see huge economic impacts if crops are developed properly and the market is there."

Skoe doesn't expect changes to occur overnight. His first goal is to get familiar with the process of effectively moving legislation along. He describes his approach to leadership as quiet and thoughtful, and he said he doesn't plan to speak much unless his comments can benefit the whole group.

He might not be quiet for too long, as he serves on House committees that will likely benefit from his experience: Agriculture Policy, Agriculture and Rural Development Finance, and Environment and Natural Resources Policy.

Skoe also indicated an interest in speaking up during the general session to remind lawmakers from larger cities about small-town concerns.

District 2B

1995 Population: 33,412
Largest city: Bagely
Counties: Becker, Beltrami, Clearwater, Mahnomon, and Polk
Location: northwestern Minnesota
Top concern: "To bring a rural perspective to the discussion; to make sure that the way laws and regulations affect rural areas is discussed as part of the process."
— Rep. Rod Skoe



Several members of the House Taxes Committee expressed concern in a hearing Jan. 18 that Gov. Jesse Ventura's sales tax rebate plan could be considered redistribution of wealth.

Rep. Dave Bishop (R-Rochester), chair of the House Ways and Means Committee and potential sponsor of the governor's proposal, said that if you look carefully, you could probably find other instances in which Minnesota law redistributes wealth.

"We are somewhat of a Marxist state," Bishop reminded the committee.

To which Rep. Ron Abrams

(R-Minnetonka) responded, "Would that be Harpo or Groucho?"

"If there's a page around, could they please throw Commissioner Weaver out of the well?" joked Rep. Rich Stanek (R-Maple Grove), chair of the House Crime Prevention Committee, at a Jan. 19 meeting.

Apparently former Rep. Charlie Weaver, newly appointed commissioner of public safety, isn't used to his new position — away from the committee table. He was greeting members behind the table, breaching informal separation of power etiquette.

Members of the House Health and Human Services Finance Committee were deep into discussion regarding the settlement between the state and large tobacco companies during a hearing Jan. 20.

Suddenly, a metal device used to cover an access spot in the ceiling above Rep. Kevin Goodno (R-Moorhead) let loose and fell with a clang inches in front of the committee chair.

Startled, he remarked, "I guess we'll take that as a comment on this matter from the tobacco companies."