

Growth and change

Skoe never thought his career would lead to the Legislature, and now he's seeking a Senate seat

By **Theresa Stahl**

Reading his political resume, one might think Rep. Rod Skoe (DFL-Clearbrook) had always planned to run for state office.

"It really was not a long-term plan or goal I had to run for the Legislature," the second-term legislator said.

But his latest move would lend to the theory: he's running for a Senate seat.

Retirements have left open a spot in the northwest Minnesota Senate district that corresponds with his House district. Skoe said he'll miss the "free-wheeling" nature of the House — especially not having to wear a tie — but he's looking forward to working at a different level of state governance.

"I'd like to think I'd be able to make a little bigger difference," he said.

Skoe has long been making a difference through public service, something that is in his blood.

"My parents were involved in the community, so it was natural when I moved to Clearbrook to become involved in the community," he explained. Skoe moved from Kelliher, where he grew up, to Clearbrook, about 70 miles away, a few years after he finished college.

Skoe was involved in a local commodity council for nine years and served as a school board member for three. When a county commissioner position opened, he was encouraged to run and won.

Skoe's first exposure to the Capitol came as chair of the Wild Rice Commodity Council.

"I was nervous, to be honest," he said. "It's an impressive place, but the people are nice and always make you feel welcome."

Later, when Rep. Edgar Olson (DFL-Fosston) retired from the House, he encouraged Skoe to run for his seat.

"It really never crossed my mind that I would be running for representative," Skoe said. "I was happy where I was. I understood the difficulties of moving away from the farm and the family. It just hadn't occurred to me until Edgar pulled me aside one day and was explaining to me that he had to step down and



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

After two terms, Rep. Rod Skoe will leave to run for the Senate.

I should consider giving it a shot."

Skoe said his philosophy on representing his district and creating legislation wouldn't change if he were elected to the Senate.

"In the first letter I wrote to my constituents, I said I'm trying to make sure that the things I say are accurate, and I'm trying to become well respected by members in the Legislature so that when I speak they'll listen to what I say and know that it's reasonable."

Skoe acknowledged his role as a DFL member would change from the House, where democrats are the minority, to the Senate where they hold the majority.

"I'm really a minority person (in the House) because I'm a democrat minority and I'm also rural," he said.

As a senator, he said he would probably sponsor more bills, but that was never a legislative goal.

"I didn't come down here thinking I was going to draft legislation that was going to change the world, but I did come down here

to make sure when legislation was moving that affected our area that I was a vital role in how it was drafted."

Committee hearings, where bills originate, are the part of the process Skoe said he enjoys most because of the impact it has.

Skoe serves on the House agriculture policy and finance, environment policy, and K-12 education finance committees. The committees are a good fit for his district and for his personal background, he said. Agriculture and forestry are major industries, and he himself farms wild rice and potatoes.

"He really fits the district well," said Rep. Bernie Lieder (DFL-Crookston), who is Skoe's seatmate. "He's been active in rural issues prior to coming into the Legislature."

Skoe said Lieder is the person he's worked most with at the Legislature, and the one who "really taught me that being nice goes a long ways and it's a very social process."

Lieder said Skoe is a "plain good legislator. He's exceptional and I'd hate to lose him in the House."

Rep. Bob Ness (R-Dassel) expressed the same sentiment, calling Skoe a "common sense, no nonsense" politician who's done an excellent job representing his district.

Their districts don't border, but the two have gotten to know each other through the rural issues they share — mainly agriculture and environment.

Ness, chair of the House Agriculture and Rural Development Finance Committee, said Skoe contributes a "wealth of knowledge" to the committee. He's also a good addition to the House, Ness said, someone who does his job "without the politics of the process."

Ness' words seem fitting for Skoe, who never planned on becoming a politician. But now Skoe says he's content and ready to move to a different legislative body.

"I enjoy the process," he said. "And I'm happy to be here." 🌾

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Rod Skoe
DFL
District 2B — Clearbrook
Terms: 2

Career notes: Skoe sponsored legislation governing Minnesota Pollution Control Agency feedlot rules, and he worked for several years on a bill that became law in 2002 for Consolidated Conservation Land.