

Brown a strong voice for rural housing, transportation

Rep. Kay Brown (DFL-Northfield) has been active in state DFL politics since she moved to Northfield in 1984. So when 20-year House veteran Robert Vanasek decided last year to join the Minnesota High Technology Council, Brown jumped at the opportunity to run for the vacant seat.

"Life has been good to me. . . . Now I'd like to give something back," she said.

Originally from South Dakota where she served as vice president of development at Yankton College, Brown has been a high school teacher and a small-business owner. She also served for seven years as the executive director of the Northfield Arts Guild, where she managed the organization through a restructuring period, steered a renovation effort of the guild's office building, and watched the membership level rise to nearly 600.

She's also been active in the League of Women Voters and the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, and has served on the Rice County DFL Central Committee.

Yet her path to the Legislature was no cakewalk. She bested three other candidates for



Rep. Kay Brown

the DFL endorsement and then survived a primary battle before winning last November by 1,300 votes.

Despite her own accomplishments, it's hard to read up on Brown without stumbling upon the name of Robert Vanasek, former speaker of the House and 20-year representative for northern Rice and Le Sueur counties — Brown's new constituents.

"Each member of the Legislature comes as a unique representative from their district," Brown says. "I do intend to call on Bob Vanasek — as his representative."

Brown both admires and respects Vanasek's service to the area, particularly "his ability to see both sides of an issue." That ability to compromise is something Brown hopes will serve her and her new constituents well.

District 25A stretches from Northfield to Le Center, and includes both Carleton and St. Olaf colleges and the Green Giant plant in Montgomery — divergent interests that can prove tough to balance.

Brown said she'll focus specifically on the problems that touch all of them: rural transportation and affordable housing.

As a current partner in D.H. Gustafson and Kay Brown Associates, a consulting firm which creates affordable housing for low and moderate income families, the latter is a policy area she

knows well. Already she's proposed new legislative solutions.

One bill (HF538) would mark \$880,000 in transitional housing grants. The grants would provide homeless individuals or families with housing and support services for up to two years. (See story, page 12.)

Another proposal (HF246) would lift a restriction in current law that could result in more funding for late-activity buses for school districts. It's just one example of the transportation needs of rural areas, she said.

No matter what the issue, staying in touch with her constituents is something Brown says is essential to being an effective legislator.

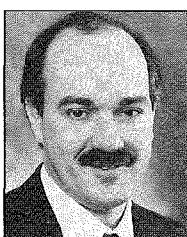
—John Tschida

District 25A

Population: 32,603
Distribution: 56 percent of residents live in urban areas, 44 percent rural
Counties: Dakota, Scott, Rice, LeSueur
Largest city: Northfield
Location: southern Minnesota
1992 presidential election results:
Clinton/Gore: 47.4 percent
Bush/Quayle: 27.8 percent
Perot/Stockdale: 24.1 percent
Other: 0.7 percent

Rookie lawmaker Tomassoni inks two-year deal

Jack Kemp. Bill Bradley. Mo Udall. Even Gerald Ford successfully made the jump into the electoral arena after hanging up his sports jersey for good.



Rep. David Tomassoni

Add Rep. David Tomassoni to the list of former athletes who've turned to politics. A high school and collegiate standout, and later a defenseman in the Italian hockey leagues, Tomassoni is perhaps the first former Olympian to gain a seat in the Legislature since Wendell Anderson came to the state Capitol in 1962.

But what makes Tomassoni's athletic career a bit unique is that he played for the Italian Olympic squad in 1984 — not Team USA. Tomassoni, 40, also had a National Hockey League tryout with the New York Rangers after graduating from Denver University with a bachelor of science degree in business administration. Returning to Minnesota for good in 1990 with his wife, Charlotte, two sons, Dante and Danny, and daughter, Chauntell, he set up shop as an insurance broker and also filled in as an assistant coach for the Chisholm High School hockey team.

One would suspect his on-ice renown — particularly in the puck-happy Iron Range cities of Hibbing and Chisholm — gave him a leg up on the competition for the District 5B seat.

But it was an unsuccessful run for a county commissioner's post four years earlier that Tomassoni credits for allowing him to emerge from a crowded primary field last September and to roll to an easy win in November.

"The '88 race gave me some important name recognition," he said. "That was my first taste of politics. I didn't win but I liked what I got involved in. I can't tell you exactly why we won this time — we ran a real issues-oriented campaign and it just worked."

Because of the overwhelming impact taconite mining plays in the lives of his constituents, Tomassoni said revitalizing the often-beleaguered industry will be among his chief legislative concerns.

"The focus has to be to save what [jobs] we have and try to find something else" and plan for the future, he said. "We have to figure out how to compete worldwide."

Tomassoni said he expects to make some tough decisions as he and his colleagues work to get the state's balance sheet back in order. He said the task has been aided by a talented caucus

staff, and his new constituents giving him time to grow into the job.

Past experiences also have taught him how to roll with the punches, explore alternative methods to achieve a goal, and to just relax when the situation warrants.

"I was over there [in Italy] for 16 seasons and in that time they made 16 different rules for foreign players," he said. "There were 16 different regular season formats and 16 different playoff formats."

"I never knew which team I could play on from season to season, so I signed 16 separate one-year contracts. This is my first two-year contract ever."

—Dave Price

District 5B

Population: 32,467
Distribution: 100 percent of residents live in rural areas *
County: St. Louis
Largest city: Hibbing
Location: northeastern Minnesota
1992 presidential election results:
Clinton/Gore: 61.2 percent
Bush/Quayle: 18.6 percent
Perot/Stockdale: 19.6 percent
Other: 0.6 percent

* U.S. Census definition