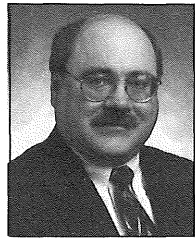


Gleason's House career takes off with airport action

By Paul Wahl

The din of everyday activity in the Minnesota House should not be a problem for newly elected Rep. Mark Gleason (DFL-Richfield).



Rep. Mark Gleason

He's accustomed to noise, living adjacent to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

In fact, the airport and its impact on his district will likely consume much of his time this coming session.

On Dec. 22, 1998, Gleason filed a suit against the Metropolitan Airport Commission (MAC) challenging the validity of an Environmental Impact Statement prepared for a proposed runway expansion. The commission wants to build a new runway in the buffer zone between the airport and residences in east Richfield.

Gleason said that the environmental document completed didn't adequately address noise and other issues. And when the Richfield City Council voted to strike an accord with the commission and not contest the study, Gleason saw few options.

"I went home that night and began drafting my lawsuit," said Gleason. "It was always assumed the city would file a suit against MAC on the grounds of noise and that the investigation of noise concerns was inadequate."

Gleason said he didn't believe MAC's "vague promise to work with the city to get the Legislature to provide money to address noise issues" went far enough. And he didn't believe the city should give up its rights to challenge the project on an environmental basis.

Oddly enough, concern over the airport expansion was not Gleason's pivotal issue during his House campaign.

It was education — particularly improving public education.

The airport issue "took on a life of its own," he said. And it will continue to live and breathe throughout the upcoming session.

Gleason, who will serve on the House Governmental Operations & Veterans Affairs, Local Government, and State Government Finance committees, believes he can have an impact on the airport issues from his seat in the House.

"The Legislature has the ultimate responsibility for making people whole when they've been harmed or injured by the action of a state agency like the MAC," he said. "This district needs a strong voice to make sure people are protected."

Gleason's bid for the District 63B seat began with a contested endorsement. His opponent for the DFL endorsement was Richfield City Councilor Susan Rosenberg.

Gleason said there were hard feelings at the time, but the two have since patched up their differences. Rosenberg, who voted against the Richfield decision not to challenge the environmental study of the airport expansion, was at Gleason's side when he held a press conference last December to announce the filing of his suit.

Among the items Gleason would like to see accomplished this session is making the MAC an elected body, but he admits it's probably too late to introduce that concept and push it through this year.

He said the main benefit of that change

would be to make the commission more responsive. Currently, the governor appoints members.

"Right now, the MAC doesn't have a lot of empathy for people," he said.

As an accountant and tax attorney, Gleason also has views on how the state's taxes should be restructured and the state budget surplus returned to the people.

"I campaigned on property-tax reductions because property taxes are the most unfair," Gleason said.

He will also work to increase the state's share of finance for public education.

Gleason, whose wife is a physician, is also an advocate of patients' rights when it comes to dealing with health insurance companies.

This was Gleason's first campaign for public office, although he's not a complete stranger to the House. For six months in 1994, he served as the House controller.

Gleason said he found campaigning to be a lot of fun, but also a lot of hard work.

District 63B

1995 population: 32,603
Largest city: Minneapolis
County: Hennepin
Location: South Minneapolis/Richfield
Top concern: "Because of the airport and other transportation issues and how they impact residents, representing this district poses a special challenge."

— Rep. Mark Gleason



While advocating that the 4,800 loggers in Minnesota be included in a tax rebate program aimed at Minnesota's farmers, Rep. Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia) couldn't help but get in a plug for the many Finnish loggers in his area, who he says are among the world's best.

When the first television shots of the moon were transmitted back to Earth, his father-in-law — who is Finnish — told him it was no big deal, the Finns had already been there.

Incredulous, Rukavina asked how he knew that.

"You don't see any trees there, do you?" his father-in-law responded.

Gene Hugoson had been appointed commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture by Gov. Jesse Ventura just three hours before he stepped in front of the House Agriculture Policy Committee Jan. 13 to provide an overview of his department.

But he was well prepared. Hugoson had served in the commissioner's seat since July 1995 when he was appointed by then-governor Arne Carlson. His appointment expired at noon Jan. 4.

Hugoson, a corn and soybean farmer in Martin County near East Chain, Minn., is also

no stranger to House committees. He served in the House from 1986 to 1995, logging four years as assistant minority leader.

Committee members and others applauded enthusiastically as Hugoson took his seat at the witness table.

He thanked those present, and said his only regret was that Sharon Clark would now have to return to deputy commissioner of agriculture status. Clark moved into the commissioner's chair after Hugoson's appointment expired.