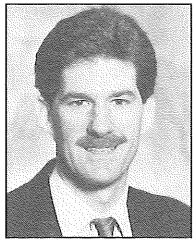


Freshman profile . . .

## Knight hopes to help curb state spending

Rep. Kevin Knight (IR-Bloomington) had only one month to pull together a winning campaign. It didn't help that the month was



Rep. Kevin Knight

December, which included holidays, frigid temperatures, and plenty of snow.

"Basically, I campaigned 14 to 16 hours a day. It helps that my wife and my kids were very supportive," Knight said.

Nor did the Bloomington political community hesitate to help out. His campaign manager, Bill Walsh, and hundreds of volunteers trudged from door to door through snow to help get out the vote, Knight said.

"Volunteers came forward knowing it was such a short race, it wasn't this huge time commitment," Knight said. His campaign put up more than 300 lawn signs and made thousands of phone calls during the short race.

His success mirrors those of past special elections. Since 1971, IR candidates for the House and Senate have won 27 of 35 special elections.

The District 40B seat opened in December

when Kathleen Blatz, a 15-year House veteran, was named a Hennepin County District Court judge. Knight, 36, had been involved in local IR caucuses only three years, but hit the ground running. He not only won the IR party endorsement over two other contenders, he bested both the DFL candidate and an independent candidate.

He grew up in Chicago, attended the University of Arizona, where he earned a degree in history, then moved to San Francisco. He relocated to Minnesota in 1984 to start a business with his brother. They sold safety products for a manufacturer. Now, he publishes a newsletter focusing on economic trends and forecasts.

Knight says he is by no means a political insider. Winning the nomination over the two other IR candidates proved to be the "high point of the race" for him.

"I had to meet all the delegates, but that wasn't terribly difficult, it was just a matter of meeting them. I had a lot of fun at the convention. But I suppose it's always fun when you win," he said.

The freshman legislator arrived at the Capitol one month before session began and immediately dived into his work, much the way he threw himself into his campaign. He

got his first taste of state government by attending an Environment and Natural Resources subcommittee meeting. In fact, he's already learned his first lesson.

"Legislative speak is not regular English. You have to learn all the acronyms and the verbiage," he said.

Knight hasn't forgotten the predominant reason voters put him in office — his forceful pledge to curb state spending. It's the issue he stressed most while door knocking. Knight already has a plan to do just that, but he is not talking about it yet.

"State spending is the number one problem we have relating to taxes going up because spending is going up," he said.

— Jean M. Thilmany

### District 40B

**Population:** 32,313

**Distribution:** 100 percent of residents live in urban areas.

**County:** Hennepin

**Location:** southwestern Metro

**1992 presidential election results:**

Clinton/Gore: 41.3 percent

Bush/Quayle: 34.3 percent

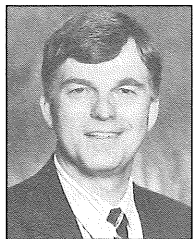
Perot/Stockdale: 23.5 percent

Other: 0.9 percent

Freshman profile . . .

## Van Engen's vow includes 'telling it like it is'

Rep. Tom Van Engen (IR-Spicer) had to wait a little longer than he had hoped to take the oath of office as the state's newest representative.



Rep. Tom Van Engen

The Independent-Republican ran for the District 15A seat in 1992 but lost to incumbent Rep. Alan Welle, the former House DFL majority leader who resigned in January following the misuse of his long distance telephone line.

"I was always taught that this is a representative government, and I could be involved in it," said Van Engen, who won a Feb. 8 special election.

Emerging from a district so closely touched by the political cloud of the House phone

troubles, the new representative believes he was elected because his constituents see him as straightforward and more like themselves than other politicians.

"It seems to me that people are most interested in honest, hard working representation and people telling it like it is," he said.

Van Engen, 40, works for Kandiyohi County Family Services as a licensed social worker specializing in chemical dependency. He said his career has given him a great deal of experience with 'telling it like it is.'

"My business is sending people to alcohol treatment," Van Engen said. "They're usually not too happy with the news I give them, but they respect me because I'm honest."

A self-titled active Christian, Van Engen has served in several positions within his church. For more than a decade, he has filled

in for pastors who were not able to conduct services. As both a husband and a father of three, Van Engen feels his constituents appreciate his stand on "moral issues."

Although he describes himself as a moderate conservative, Van Engen is quick to point out that, unlike the label suggests, he opposes abortion. He also calls himself fiscally conservative, saying he can "pinch pennies with the best of them." In the spectrum of most issues such as energy policies, however, the new lawmaker says he is moderate.

Holding onto his belief that government invites citizen participation, Van Engen has worked his way up the political ladder through positions such as chair of the Kandiyohi County Independent-Republican Party and then Senate district chair. His first campaign was the unsuccessful attempt to unseat Welle in 1992.