

New members . . .

McElroy focuses on workers' comp, affordable housing, transportation

He plays bridge on the Internet and considers himself a bleacher bum with his nephews at basketball games. He transformed a three-employee travel business with \$1 million in sales into a business with 85 employees and \$35 million in sales, which he later sold.



Rep. Dan McElroy

Rep. Dan McElroy, a first-term Independent-Republican lawmaker from Burnsville, has a wide array of experiences he plans to bring to the House. The history major from the University of Notre Dame has been the mayor of Burnsville for about eight years and served on the city council before that.

His transition into politics was accidental.

About 14 years ago, the Burnsville city government annoyed some local people when it was about to split its public safety department into separate police and fire departments.

One of those people, McElroy, attended the city council meeting, his first direct experience in Minnesota politics. He was bothered by the way the city administration was pushing through the idea with little public input.

"The process was the problem," he said, not necessarily that some city leaders wanted to split the department.

McElroy, 46, now owns a travel agency management consulting firm and said his business experience helps in the Legislature. "Government is a business owned by its customers."

The difference, he said, is that government doesn't have competition so it also needs to serve a marketplace function and put the brakes on spending and programs people may want but can't afford.

McElroy said he doesn't plan to introduce a lot of his own legislation this year. He said he wants to learn the House system first.

His interests include workers' compensa-

tion, affordable housing, and transit issues.

The administration of workers' compensation is something that can be streamlined without reducing benefits to injured workers. If you cut costs, you can lower the premiums, he said.

He points to the owner of a roofing business in Minnesota paying \$1.09 for every \$1 of payroll for workers' compensation and a roofer in North Carolina paying 20 cents for every \$1 of payroll.

He has served on the governor's council on affordable housing and said he plans to oppose any House bill mandating local governments offer specific levels of affordable housing.

Instead of mandates he prefers local governments offer incentives to encourage developers to build affordable housing in their community.

Regarding transportation, McElroy is concerned about Minnesota's involvement with Light Rail Transit. "Light Rail Transit is not a magic panacea." Buses and carpooling are necessary and LRT must be concentrated in an area where lots of people go to and from the same place to be effective and affordable.

McElroy said he is excited about the legislative session but added: "I liken it to a dog chasing a school bus. What do you do when you catch it? I'm working hard to learn the answer to that."

— K. Darcy Hanzlik

It's a fact!

Recent changes in Minnesota's ethics and campaign finance laws have made it clear to the public that state lawmakers are not beholden to special interests.

But few remember that a similar wave of public opinion concerning legislative ethics led to radical changes in state law in 1912.

"Taking government away from the 'interests' and returning it to the people became the slogan of the times" — so it was written in *Minnesota: Political Maverick* by the Minnesota Historical Society.

It was the peak of the Progressive movement in 1912, the same year that Theodore Roosevelt abandoned the Republican Party and ran for president as an Independent. Although he lost the election, he carried the state of Minnesota.

"In the disillusionment of the early 1900s . . . the badge 'independent' began to stand for virtue and high principle, while a vote 'for the man and not the party' came to mean a vote for honesty in government," according to the historical society book.

And so during a 13-day special session, Minnesota lawmakers enacted sweeping changes to state law: a statewide political primary election, direct election of U.S. senators (previously chosen by legislators), and campaign spending limits. The session also brought us the law which prohibits the distribution of campaign materials on election day.

"In thirteen days the legislature completely revolutionized the state's present political system," wrote the *Minneapolis Journal* on June 18, 1912.

District 36B

Population: 32,679
Distribution: 100 percent urban
County: Dakota
Largest city: Burnsville
Location: southcentral Metro
Unemployment rate: 2.96 percent
Residents living below poverty level: 3.64 percent
1992 presidential election results:
Bush/Quayle 36.26 percent
Clinton/Gore 36.88 percent
Perot/Stockdale 26.13 percent
Other: 0.73 percent