

Mosel's farm background reflects constituency

Darrel Mosel (DFL-Gaylord) is a political rarity on several counts.

He's one of only 16 farmers who now sit in the House; he defeated a firmly-ensconced incumbent in last fall's election; and he plans to stick by a promise to vote independently during his first term.

It may be fitting that Mosel traces his political roots to the farm economy's collapse during the mid-1980s. The first-term DFLer now represents one of Minnesota's most rural districts.

Fresh out of college, he began farming in 1981. The timing couldn't have been worse. His crops flourished in the fertile Sibley County soil, but they weren't worth anything.

"Everything was falling. I had dairy, and even that was falling," he said. "And it all seemed to happen right after 1981. I don't know if it coincided with the [presidential] election or not, but for whatever reason everything started collapsing."

That economic concern crystallized into political activism. Mosel became involved in farm groups, started going to precinct caucuses, and eventually was recruited to run for the House in

1986, a campaign he describes as a learning experience.

He ran more aggressively — but unsuccessfully — two years later, and finally won on his third try last fall. His opponent in all three contests was Gary Schafer, who had served since 1980.

"There was a mixed bag of issues," he said of the last campaign. "Probably the biggest issue that helped me win this election was the perception that if anyone could help to bring a change in education financing, I could."

Like many other rural school boards, Sibley County school boards supported merging districts to cut costs. Now, there is a growing realization that it may not be working.

"Every school district in my district is concerned about what's going to happen down the road during the next five to 10 years," he said. "Most of us are convinced that bigger is not better. We've finally learned that some of the big high schools are in worse financial shape than some of the small ones."

On agricultural issues, Mosel said he doesn't sense a significant gap in understanding between the dwindling numbers of rural representatives and those from suburban and metro areas. Most lawmakers strongly support family farms, he said.

Mosel's agriculture-dominated district is also

mostly conservative. Having a DFLer as representative will be a new experience, but he knows what his constituents expect.

"I promised them that I would vote independently," he said. "And I think they like that. I also look forward to providing my district a better working relationship with the DFL majority."

"I do believe a representative has the responsibility to bring forth his ideas and his opinions, and legislate as a representative of the whole state, while still respecting where you come from."

— Jim Anderson

District 23B

Population: 32,258

Distribution: 85.6 percent of residents live in rural areas; 14.4 percent in urban areas.

Counties: Blue Earth, Brown, McLeod, Nicollet, Sibley

Largest city: Glencoe

Location: south central Minnesota

1992 presidential election results:

Bush/Quayle: 33.4 percent

Perot/Stockdale: 33.1 percent

Clinton/Gore: 33 percent

Other: 0.5 percent

Pawlenty hopes to bridge suburban, urban concerns

Partisanship and polemics have always been present in politics. But Rep. Tim Pawlenty (IR-Eagan) isn't planning on investing in old ideas or past divisions. Pawlenty wants to build bridges across both partisan and economic lines.

"I would call myself a 'different kind of Republican.' I don't fall into any kind of traditional pigeon-hole," he said.

Rep. Tim Pawlenty Pawlenty, a 32-year-old attorney, is a proud product of an ethnic, blue collar family that he said is largely apolitical. A self-defined "student of policy" and "a product of local government," he majored in political science at the University of Minnesota and went on to graduate from the university's law school. He then served on both the Eagan Planning Commission and the Eagan City Council. Pawlenty won district 38B's open seat when former Rep. Art Seaberg opted for a run at the state Senate.

Prior to the 1993 legislative session, Pawlenty worked with Minnesota's chapter of Common Cause — an organization working to promote

open government and political reform — to develop his legislative agenda. In fact, Pawlenty has already introduced (HF163), a bill aimed at reducing the influence of interest group contributions in political campaigns.

Changing the way Minnesota politicians think about public policy is another of Pawlenty's goals. Specifically, he wants others to realize that the entire metro area is linked by a common culture and an integrated economy.

"I feel very strongly that we would be remiss to simply focus on 'suburban issues' and a 'suburban agenda' when the core of the inner cities — the central, urban areas of St. Paul and Minneapolis — are suffering greatly. Suburbs need to have partnerships with the urban areas . . . because we're all in this together."

Pawlenty said that the homogeneous stereotypes of Minnesota suburbs are misleading. "We have a much more diverse population than people might imagine," he said. And increasingly, some suburbs also have more problems — housing decay and declining economic status among them.

Pawlenty made it clear that he wants to reach out to those troubled core areas, which are represented almost exclusively by DFLers.

"They can't do it alone," he said. "The problems are too big."

While DFLers seem receptive, Pawlenty said he believes members of his party "by and large have vacated the agenda" of the cities.

Republicans need to articulate a vision that appeals to the "mainstream" and to a more diverse coalition of voters, he said.

"I think that if the Republican party is ever going to be a majority party, particularly in Minnesota, it has to diversify. . . not simply focus on tax and spend issues and social issues."

— Adam Samaha

District 38B

Population: 31,928

Distribution: wholly urban; all residents live within city.

Counties: Dakota

Largest city: Eagan

Location: south Metro

1992 presidential election results:

Bush/Quayle: 36.2 percent

Clinton/Gore: 38.2 percent

Perot/Stockdale: 25.2 percent

Other: 0.4 percent