

Thompson hopes to spur outstate economy

Rep. Loren P. Thompson (DFL-Waubun) used to market electronic optics for a defense industry company. These days he's running a busy resort complex on the White Earth Indian Reservation in western Minnesota.

But last November, he got himself another job: representing the people of District 10A, which includes parts of Becker and Otter Tail counties.

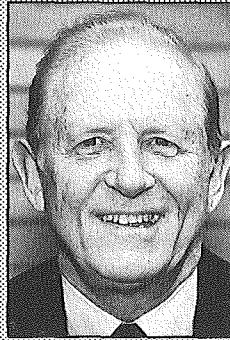
Thompson, who with his wife, Jane, in 1976 bought the Cedar Crest resort 30 miles north of Detroit Lakes, had just returned to Minnesota in 1986 when he was prodded into running for office by former state representative Janet Clark, a DFLer.

Thompson had left a job as a vice president with Boston-based Galileo Electrooptics Corp. to get more involved with the resort. But he soon found himself challenging Cal Larson for the District 10 Senate seat.

Thompson lost in the heavily IR district, but the contest whetted his appetite. He ran in 1988 for the District 10A seat and lost in a close race against Rep. Dennis Poppenhagen (IR-Detroit Lakes).

Last year the tide turned, and Thompson defeated Poppenhagen.

"I have never worked for anything so hard in my life," says Thompson, adding,



Loren P. Thompson

District 10A

Home: Waubun

Occupation: Resort operator

District traits: 10A, which is dotted with many lakes, is "agri-tourist" in nature and has a developing manufacturing and industrial base. Many tourists come from the Fargo area. The district voted for Bush-Quayle over Dukakis-Bentsen by a 56.4-percent-to-43.6 percent margin.

"I'm the first DFL representative to win Detroit Lakes."

Like most freshmen, he has spent most of his time learning the system. But, he adds, "I'm very excited about the potential."

Keeping in contact with constituents in his rural district, a three-hour drive from the Capitol, will be difficult, Thompson concedes. It's a logistical problem shared by many outstate representatives.

"It's a severe handicap," he says, referring to a continuing problem in outstate Minnesota. "Our constituents in rural Minnesota can't receive the same level of services as the metro [Twin Cities]."

Some people see Thompson as a political anomaly. He comes from the defense industry, traditionally one that's

tied more to Republican ideology, and now he's a small business owner. But he considers himself a "strong environmentalist," among other social concerns usually associated with the Democrats.

"I'm a fiscal conservative," Thompson says, "but when it comes to human issues, I'm a Democrat."

For his district, major concerns are economic development and the environment. Thompson's first choice for a committee assignment was the International Trade and Technology Division of the Economic Development Committee.

Using his background in the international marketing of defense-related products, Thompson says he wants to contribute "to expanding Minnesota's trade horizons."

It's a fact!

Ever get a tad queasy when climbing the oval staircase in the state Capitol? Ever feel like those stairs just aren't meant to hold too many people?

The staircase, designed by architect Cass Gilbert, was built on the "cantilever principle," a bold concept in Gilbert's day. The stairs are fastened on one end to a rigid vertical support inside the wall. Each stair literally hangs from the wall.

While some may prefer to hug the wall as they walk up or down the staircase, those more daring may peer over the handrail and have an unobstructed, and spectacular, view all the way down. Or up.



According to Capitol lore, when the Capitol Building opened at the turn of the century, people were wary about stepping onto a staircase with no visible means of support.