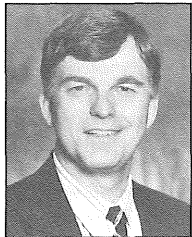


Freshman profile . . .

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.