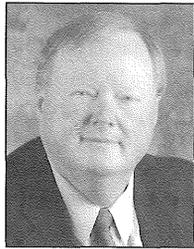


Now is the time

After years of 'unofficially' representing the interests of his district, Dill takes a seat in St. Paul

By MIKE COOK

Like many students, as a youngster Rep. David Dill (DFL-Crane Lake) came to the State Capitol and met with his legislator. Now he is taking "his life's biggest field trip" as the new DFL representative from District 6A.



Rep. David Dill

The district is the state's largest geographically, encompassing most of northeast Minnesota and more than 9,600 square miles. "We certainly have more deer than people," he said with a chuckle.

Dill has a unique living arrangement in that his Crane Lake home is on an island in Voyageurs National Park, forcing his 13-year-old son, Drake, to take a boat, ATV, canoe, or snowmobile to the bus stop. His family also has a winter home 30 miles away in Orr, where Dill has been the city administrator for 12 years.

As a child, Dill spent summers in the area with his parents, before permanently moving to Crane Lake in 1982 with his wife, Tucky, after selling their charter airline business.

"I didn't realize I'd been running for state representative since then," he said. "I knew all the people from growing up there so when we permanently moved back I got involved in community leadership and economic development right away, lobbying at the Capitol and going to Washington D.C. to represent the community as a volunteer. After about seven or eight years of that they said, 'We'd like to hire you and make it official.'"

Dill said he mentored under retired Sen. Doug Johnson (DFL-Tower) for 10-15 years before deciding to run. When former Rep. Tom Bakk (DFL-Cook) sought Johnson's Senate seat, many people encouraged Dill to seek the vacant House seat, Dill said.

The campaign galvanized Dill's family like never before in terms of working together. "My

son went to 2,000 houses over the course of the summer and knocked on the door, and said, 'My name is Drake Dill and my dad is running for the House of Representatives.' He gave them literature and answered questions on positions."

Like his dad, Drake also won an election in 2002, earning a seat on his school's student council. Drake is a seventh grader in the Orr

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K-12 school.

Dill recalls coming home one day and having Drake show him a speech he was preparing. "He described supply-side economics in a way that it related to kids in school and how they interact with each other and their teachers. I said, 'My God, that's good.'"

The economics of his district is one of three key issues for Dill. The others are higher education to retrain workers, and services to seniors.

Citing the importance of the dollars for cities in his district, Dill opposes the cutting of local government aid (LGA) to help balance the state's budget. "I have two cities in our district where LGA is more than 50 percent of their entire budget. Some communities are teetering on a very difficult platform making it difficult to balance things."

Shortly before Christmas a sawmill operator told Dill that his workforce had shrunk from 26 people to three people in the previous month. "That's just a common thing right now," Dill said. "It's an economic circle that we have to survive. This is not the first time it has happened, but we need to be smarter than before and prepare for the next thing."

Logging and mining industries are crucial to those in the district, but millions of forested

acres in Cook and Lake counties are federally protected. "That land has been taken out of production and local people can no longer earn a living off that land, yet when I went to St. Paul one of the things I said at my new member orientation was that I was aghast at the amount of paper that is everywhere," Dill said. "How can there be that much need for paper if we can't cut a renewable resource?"

"We're trying to make adjustments to the fact that there is a substantially reduced flow of wood fiber coming from our district and we're having a difficult time adjusting to the economics that drive the mining industry. A substantial amount of residents in our district are unemployed in the mining industry from

the LTV (mine in Hoyt Lakes) shutdown."

Because of that, higher education for retraining workers is another area of focus for Dill. Of the two colleges in District 6A, he said, "These facilities are extremely important for the retraining." In fact, the first bill he sponsored (HF72) is money for land acquisition at Vermilion Community College in Ely.

Despite the hardships, Dill said many people remain in the area once they retire. "They're tough people that immigrated here and have lived their whole lives here. We have a responsibility to provide them with services, like health care, nursing homes, and in-home health care."

DISTRICT 6A

2002 population: 36,625

Largest cities: Ely and Two Harbors

Countries: Cook, Lake, St. Louis

Location: northeast Minnesota

Top Concern: "The preservation of local government aid to communities with low property wealth. If LGA is reduced and communities increase property taxes, the increase is felt by every property owner, old, employed, unemployed, retired, business, etc."

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