

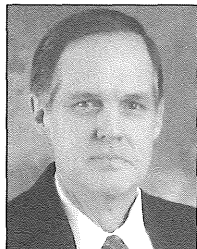
True to his roots

From township board to St. Paul, Lindgren wants to continue sculpting quality legislation for his area

By TOM LONERGAN

Wherever Rep. Doug Lindgren (R-Bagley) goes, a bit of his creativity is not far behind.

In his House office in St. Paul, there's a small reception table Lindgren welded together from car engine parts. On the campaign trail last year, a 1963 Jeep that Lindgren restored pulled a caterpillar-like 16-foot-long welded piece of empty Freon tanks. Painted green, Lindgren's "recycle-pillar" had spark plugs for antennas. The piece "became a visual trademark of my campaign," he said. "The kids got a kick out of it."



Rep. Doug Lindgren

Lindgren has made a number of art pieces from car parts and other scrap material readily available from the family-run gas station he owns in Bagley, west of Bemidji.

Creating legislation as a freshman representative, Lindgren said, may prove to be a bit more challenging than his sculpture. "It's really hard coming down here and getting hit with this huge budget deficit," said the 52-year-old Navy veteran. "A lot of your pre-conceived notions are stripped away."

For 18 years, Lindgren served on the Copley Township Board of Supervisors. His wife, Colleen, is the Bagley city clerk and accountant for the family business. His first taste of making government work, Lindgren recalled, came when he wanted a road repaired in front of his house. "I was told, 'Run for the township board and fix it yourself,'" Lindgren said.

As with many new Republican representatives, Lindgren was encouraged to run for the House by Speaker Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon). "I didn't know him," Lindgren said. "He called and said he wanted to meet me." After lunch and a week to think about it, Lindgren said he was "hooked." He won last November's election by just 443 votes (2.94 percent).

Lindgren said he's the first conservative elected from the district in many decades. Yet, during his introduction to the House, he said

he's found a different tone than strict partisanship. "I'm finding out it's more issue-based," Lindgren said. His committee assignments include the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance, Environment Policy, and Agriculture Policy committees.

The difficulties small towns in Greater Minnesota are having due to declining population and slack economic development will be uppermost in his approach to issues, Lindgren said. Jobs are scarce in towns like Bagley, and the southern portion of his district – which includes popular recreation areas like Itasca State Park – offers mostly seasonal jobs, he added.

State tax breaks for new or expanding busi-

nesses in economically depressed areas are important, Lindgren said, "but I'm not for giving stuff away." He favors approaches like tax increment financing which, he said, has been "a boon for Bagley." The incentive approach helped the town land Team Industries, a company that makes transmissions for Polaris. In a tax increment district, a company's tax bill is relieved initially, but eventually paid as the business prospers, Lindgren said.

He said Gov. Tim Pawlenty's proposal to create up to 10 tax-free zones for businesses in rural Minnesota, "sounds like a good deal but it could create a lot of controversy between different cities." But, Lindgren added, the state needs to respond to neighboring states like South Dakota "enticing business away with tax breaks."

Local government aid is another issue that hits close to home. The state's financial assistance provides 30 percent of Copley Township's annual budget, he said. "We didn't like unfunded mandates" from the state, Lindgren added, "but then I get here and see why they happen."

He said he plans to take a "strong look" at the funding formula for local government aid. "I have a hard time understanding why Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth get local government aid when they have a tax base and can create revenue," Lindgren said.

"How does Bagley create a tax base? It's just not there," he said. With a population of just over 1,000, losing 60 people a year is "a big deal" in Bagley.

And education is a key issue, with a son in college and a daughter in high school, he said.

Lindgren's gas station, which he worked at as a young man and now run by his son, Jeremiah, provides service at the pump, with windshield washing, an oil check, small repairs, and daily shoptalk. Lindgren said the latter helped him develop a "common sense" approach to issues.

"He sure has a knack for that political thing," Jeremiah said. "He's a pretty good talker and he really, really listens to people."

"During the campaign we heard from a lot of

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— Rep. Doug Lindgren

people that lawmakers in general seem more concerned about the Twin Cities area and lump everywhere else as Greater Minnesota." Jeremiah said. He said his father will "represent this area and he's serious about listening to people here."

Asked if he or his dad is the boss when they work together, the younger Lindgren said, "Mom's the boss. She writes the paychecks."

DISTRICT 2B

2002 population: 36,482

Largest city: Park Rapids

Counties: Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Pennington, Polk

Location: northwest Minnesota

Top concern: "Government is moving away from the common man. I don't like what that looks like. Common sense and accountability has left government and we need to bring that back."

— Rep. Doug Lindgren

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