

# Magnus will run for state Senate

## Says activist influences are detrimental to good of state

By **Kris Berggren**

Rep. Doug Magnus (R-Slayton) calls his three young grandchildren, “the light of my life” and enjoys giving them tractor rides around the family farm in the southwestern corner of the state.

The 6-, 5- and 3-year-old children of the lawmaker’s daughter, Lori, also know their grandfather dons a suit and tie part of the year and heads almost 200 miles to St. Paul. The children think their grandpa works in “the castle,” as they’ve dubbed the Capitol complex, but his political style is anything but top-down.

As a freshman legislator, he sponsored a key bill in collaboration with a team that he recruited, including the state demographer and several agency heads.

“HF3,” Magnus said. “It was one of the top initiatives that year, JOBZ. It continues to exist. It was an economic development program for rural Minnesota credited with creating over 16,000 jobs,” he said. “That was my first big endeavor. And a big challenge.”

Eight years later, Magnus is leaving his House seat. Just as rotating crops is good for the soil, a periodic change in legislative members is good for the state, Magnus believes, though he stops short of supporting term limits.

He plans to run for the Senate seat being vacated by Sen. Jim Vickerman (DFL-Tracy).

“With the retirements of a lot of veteran rural leaders in the Senate, I decided they needed some experience there,” Magnus said.

“Besides, my wife said, ‘What are you going to do with all your suits?’”

He’s found a use for his old neckties, however, donating them to Teen Challenge, a residential treatment program for young men and women with chemical dependency problems. Participants work on their sobriety, go to school and work and sing in churches around the state on Sundays. He also collects old bicycles, repairs and donates them, so participants can get to their jobs.

“I’m a farmer. I can fix pretty much everything,” he said.

Teen Challenge helped him with one thing he could not easily fix — the substance abuse of his

son, Clint, a recovering methamphetamine addict who spent about a year in treatment there. Now 30, Clint farms with his father and continues to wrestle with recovery, Magnus reports, but has more good days than bad.

Magnus has co-sponsored bills to strengthen laws and penalties regarding sale of over-the-counter drugs used as precursors in the manufacture of methamphetamine and to clean up meth lab sites.

In his eight years in the House, his philosophy of holding state office is simple. He considers two questions about any piece of legislation: “First I would ask is this good for the state; second, does this hurt my district?”

Magnus said he is “known as one of the least partisan people here” and assumes that his fellow lawmakers on both sides of the aisle also have the best interests of the state in mind.

However, the seasoned lawmaker thinks “an increasingly evident” problem is the prevalence of “key activist” groups that wield money and influence over candidate endorsements. He said this problem isn’t unique to Minnesota, but is true of states with large urban centers where the concentration of need and wealth come to bear on the political process at federal and state levels.

“They just need 20-25 people to caucus and get (candidates) endorsed,” Magnus said. “The endorsed candidate will get 80 to 85 percent of the vote, and money from the groups.”

On the DFL side, such groups include unions, “entitlement” activists, environmentalists and Indian tribes, he said.

“On the other side of it, you’ve got



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

After eight years in the House, Rep. Doug Magnus wants to continue his legislative work in a different chamber.

conservative Republicans that are horrified by the thought of any tax increase,” he said, “so on the other side of it, the conservative side has sprung up with the Tea Party group.

“To get the Republican endorsement you’ve got to sign the Taxpayers League pledge to say you won’t raise taxes,” he said.

With his next race in mind, that begs the question: Will Magnus seek party endorsement if it means signing such a pledge?

“I’m not signing anything except to support my people,” Magnus said.

In the meantime, he remains sanguine about the current situation. “These things go in trends. That’ll reverse itself. We’ll see more people who want to do what’s best for the state.”

### STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Doug Magnus  
Republican  
District 22A - Slayton  
Terms: 4 (elected 2002)  
Advice to successor: “Come in with an open mind. Be dedicated to doing what’s good for the state, and then what’s good for your district.”