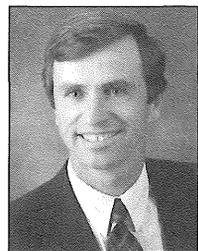


Prepared for work

Scars from the campaign trail have not dampened McNamara's desire to deliver what Minnesotans expect of their legislators

By MIKE COOK

Early in his inaugural session in the Minnesota House, Rep. Denny McNamara (R-Hastings) asked longer serving members



Rep. Denny McNamara

from both parties why they keep coming back. The answer continues to invigorate him daily.

"They all told me that they feel we can make a difference and I'm excited to be here doing it," he said. With a laugh, he added, "I think I'm starting to comprehend it

and figure it out."

That is especially important this year as the Legislature deals with an intimidating projected budget shortfall. "We need to work together and do what's best," McNamara said. "Most people probably wouldn't want to be a freshman because this isn't the ideal spot to come into having to make a lot of votes, but I think people are expecting us to make tough votes."

McNamara, an assistant majority whip, said he hopes the Legislature will resolve its biggest issue in a timely and orderly fashion, while at the same time give people an opportunity to speak their peace.

"I'm a believer in grassroots politics," he said. "I think people should be able to share their concerns and we should let them know if we think that is not the direction the state should go. I think we should always hear both sides and then make a decision."

Talking to people, McNamara said, was a key in his victory in what was somewhat a battle of names. His main opponent, Jeff Sieben, is the son of a former House speaker, but McNamara has extensive family in the district, including many of his more than 100 first cousins.

However, McNamara said he didn't rely on family connections to win. He relied on a strong work ethic.

"We made an effort to talk to everybody

twice, and everybody in Hastings three times," he said. "To that extent, we got to talk to almost everybody."

McNamara enjoyed meeting district residents, but not all the dogs. He was bitten four times. "I hope I don't add to it or pass it in two years," he said laughing. "My goal will be to get bit less."

To continue hearing constituent concerns, McNamara, a lifelong Hastings resident, plans on holding district listening sessions. "If we can empower everybody to feel they are part of these big decisions to be made, I think it will be easier for them to accept."

As a 25-year, co-owner of a nursery and landscape business, environmental issues are extremely important to McNamara, who sits

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on both House environment committees, plus higher education finance.

"I'm a different kind of tree hugger because I grow them," he said. "Most environmental issues are nonpartisan issues. Minnesota is the Land of 10,000 Lakes and we need to take care of them. A lot of people want to enjoy them, and we need to make all kinds of different ways for people to enjoy them."

The first bill he plans to sponsor is one vetoed by former Gov. Jesse Ventura four years ago. It would mandate the use of a rain sensor on automatic sprinkler systems that would turn the system off if there were adequate rainfall.

"In a commercial site it could pay for itself with one or two waterings that aren't necessary," he said. The device costs about \$30 for residential systems and maybe a "couple hundred dollars" for commercial ones. "But the bigger issue is we have limited resources of good, clean water. We don't need to use the

water if Mother Nature is giving us rain."

McNamara has known Rep. Dennis Ozment (R-Rosemount), the environment finance chair, for some time because "he's helped our industry on some issues and I've been active in our industry testifying and lobbying." Redistricting also moved Nininger Township from the veteran's district into the newcomer's. "He encouraged me to seek the seat when I was first thinking of running," McNamara said.

Ozment said he did so knowing that McNamara would be successful in St. Paul.

"Denny has been a pillar in his community and he'll be a strong voice for them," Ozment said. "He's straightforward and has a common sense approach. If something is on his mind, he'll say it."

McNamara is not a newcomer to serving in a leadership capacity, having, among other things, been a president of the Hastings Chamber of Commerce and he served 12 years on the city's natural resources and recreation commission.

During the latter he supported the creation of a skate park in his hometown.

"A group of young adults came forward and wanted this," McNamara said. "The fact that they had purple hair, baggy pants, and earrings didn't mean that they weren't great young adults. We worked together, moved forward and got a great skate park built."

DISTRICT 57B

2002 population: 36,591

Largest city: Cottage Grove

Counties: Dakota, Washington

Location: southeast Twin Cities suburbs

Top Concern: "That our Legislature be a cross section of Minnesota citizens and that we bring our real life experiences and wealth of knowledge to the Capitol to make Minnesota a better place."

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