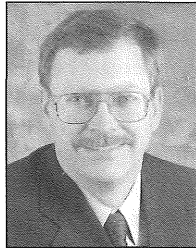


Full circle

Nelson says education is the beginning of other things important to his constituents, including transportation and safety

By MIRANDA BRYANT

There was a time when Brooklyn Park was home to many farms, and Rep. Mike Nelson (DFL-Brooklyn Park) remembers it well. The



Rep. Mike Nelson

city, which now has no operating farms, claims the fifth largest municipal population in the state — and some of the worst traffic problems. Representing District 46A, which includes Brooklyn Park, Nelson knows congestion first-hand. He said that accidents are so frequent at the intersections of U.S. Highway 169, State Highway 81, and 85th Ave. N. that residents have dubbed it “Devil’s Triangle.”

Nelson is ready to tackle the problem — and look at alternative transportation options — as a member of the House Transportation Finance Committee. Transportation projects are important not only for the potential congestion relief provided, said the freshman legislator, but because they provide jobs to construction workers and an economic stimulus for the region.

A carpenter, and for the past year a business representative for the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Nelson said he is acutely aware of how jobs affect the economy.

“A third of the economy is driven nationwide and in the state by people spending,” Nelson said. “Well, if people aren’t making decent wages, they’re not going to be able to buy the products. If we cut everybody’s wages in half our income tax collections go down, our sales tax collections go down. So people making decent livable wages so they can afford to go out and enjoy this beautiful state we have, that’s an important issue to me.”

Affordable housing is another issue important for Nelson, who worked for 16 years as a carpenter for the Minneapolis Housing Authority.

Brooklyn Park has a lot of affordable

housing, said Nelson, but many of the mayors governing surrounding cities are also looking for homes and apartments within their constituents’ means.

“There’s a real dearth of that out there right now — a lack of housing that a lot of people can afford to buy on the wages they’re being paid,” Nelson said. “And there’s always the question as to whether that is an issue of the price of the housing or if it’s an issue about what people make.”

But Nelson, a 48-year-old father of three, is most passionate about education.

“At the state level we’re mandated by the constitution to provide for the education of children,” said the Hennepin Technical College graduate. “The discussion that has to go

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Education is not a stand-alone issue to Nelson, who indicated it affects nearly every aspect of the economy.

Today’s educational decisions could impact the workforce of tomorrow, he explained. Industry and business will be forced to pay for remedial education if workers aren’t properly educated. And if employees receive smaller wages because they didn’t receive a quality education, then tax revenues will be lower.

“So we’ve got to look at these things and that’s to me the thing we have to work the hardest to preserve is funding for education,” Nelson said. “To me it’s an economic issue. If you don’t have an educated work force, companies aren’t going to move here.”

In addition to the transportation finance committee, Nelson has also been assigned to the House Commerce, Jobs, and Economic

Development Policy, and Environment and Natural Resources Policy committees.

Nelson has already gained the respect of colleagues. Rep. Lyndon Carlson (DFL-Robbinsdale) said he and Nelson have discussed mutually addressing education issues specific to the suburban area northwest of the Twin Cities.

“He’s very conscientious, very hard working and I think he’s off to an excellent start in the Minnesota House,” Carlson said of Nelson. “He’s got a good grasp and understanding of the legislative process. He’s one that is very willing to gather information and ask questions.”

Rep. Debra Hilstrom (DFL-Brooklyn Center), who represents Nelson’s neighboring district of 46B, also had good things to say about the first-term representative.

“Mike is a true reflection of his constituency in Brooklyn Park — a hard-working family man with deep roots in his community,” Hilstrom said. “Mike brings real life experience to his role as Brooklyn Park representative. I think he will do a tremendous job

representing his district.”

Nelson originally ran for the House district during the March 2002 special election. Rep. Darlene Luther, who held the seat prior to that time, died of cancer in January, leaving the seat open. Nelson was defeated by John Jordan, who served the remainder of the 2002 session. Nelson defeated Jordan in the November 2002 election.

DISTRICT 46A

2002 population: 36,558

Biggest city: Brooklyn Park

County: Hennepin

Location: northwest Twin Cities suburbs

Top Concern: “Education funding — to me that’s the biggest thing the state is supposed to do.”

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