

Mid-term replacement

Rural jobs, transportation, education, taxes are top issues for newest House member, elected in December to fill vacancy

BY PATTY JANOVEC

Minnesota's newest House member has a simple explanation for why he sought the role of legislator.



Rep. Scott Newman

"It's a matter of serving my community," said Rep. Scott Newman (R-Hutchinson), who won a Dec. 30 special election to earn a seat in the House chamber.

Newman replaces former Rep. Tony Kielkucki (R-Lester Prairie), who became a deputy secretary of state late last year. "I fully intend to do at least as good a job as Tony," Newman said, complimenting his predecessor.

Said Kielkucki, Newman will represent the area well because he's "very easy to talk to, communicates well with his constituents, knows the needs of his constituents, (and) has a great legal mind. I'm very glad he got elected to replace me."

Newman assumes Kielkucki's role on the Education Finance, Education Policy, Governmental Operations and Veterans Affairs Policy, and State Government Finance committees.

An attorney by trade, Newman has practiced law for nearly 30 years and is a certified civil trial specialist. "I've worked both sides of the fence," he said.

It's the challenge of the position that attracts people to the Legislature, he said. "I think it's going to be difficult and that's part of why I want to do this."

The learning curve has been steep, Newman said, but he looks forward to the entire experience of being a representative. "I'm going to personally see how a bill actually gets passed into law."

Newman said that members from his community encouraged him to run. So did the views of leaders in his party. "I like the

direction the speaker is going, I like the direction the governor is going, and that had a great deal of influence on me."

With his three children grown and married, he said he discussed the idea of running for office with his wife, Ginny, and came to the conclusion that it was important for him to do. "I can tell you, I'm not doing it for the money," he added with a laugh.

"There are issues that are facing us as a state, and within my county, and within my district that I think are really important," he said, citing rural jobs, transportation, education, and taxes as examples.

While his hometown of Hutchinson and

Gambling issues are a priority this session, said Newman. Feedback from his constituents included opposition to using gambling proceeds to possibly fund sports stadiums. Many of his constituents oppose gambling morally and philosophically, and proceeds are "not for general balancing of the budget," he said.

Another issue on the Republican agenda is tort reform, said Newman. As an attorney, he brings a unique perspective to the issue and said two broad issues important to him are caps and unnecessary lawsuits.

"To me the jury is pure grassroots of America," he said, comprised of members of the community evaluating a dispute as peers. Putting caps on awards allows the government to tell a jury what they will decide. "I don't think government should do that," he said.

When he looks back on his legislative days years from now, he said he hopes to be able to say, "I did a good job, and did the best job that I can, and I don't believe this is going to be

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Glencoe, also in his district, faced major local government aid cuts following the 2003 session, other smaller towns are experiencing loss of funding from declining enrollment in local schools.

Even as he deals with those issues, he said, he plans to maintain a balance between Hutchinson, which he described as a "progressive, solid town" and the more rural towns in the district facing issues such as farming and value-added products, feedlots, and permits. "I've got kind of a unique district ... and I have to balance the needs in my district."

Transportation issues are at the forefront, said Newman, with "significant accidents" happening on U.S. Highway 212 and state highway 7. With bonding measures up for discussion this session, he said he promises to keep a constant eye on funding to take care of the problems in district 18A.

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DISTRICT 18A

2002 Population: 36,487

Largest City: Hutchinson

Counties: McLeod, Meeker

Location: west of the Twin Cities metropolitan area

Top concern: "(Graduation) Standards - I am on that committee and it is an important topic at the moment."

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