

Man toward the middle

Kranz aims for balanced approach in oft-partisan politics

By **MIKE COOK**

Rep. Scott Kranz (DFL-Blaine) calls himself a "Suburban Democrat."

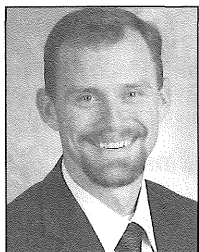
"Out on the campaign trail it hit me that, to a lot of my constituents, Democrat or Republican means nothing. People are just fed up," he said. "I'm a 25-year resident of this area, I deliberately chose to raise my kids (Lucas, 10, and Ryan, 8) here; I like this area. I'm not either one, so I started calling myself a 'Suburban Democrat.'"

He sees himself as "fiscally responsible, even to the point of being conservative," but with a moderate point of view on social issues. "I like to think that in most cases my opinion goes to the direction of if you want to do

something on your own time you should have the freedom to do that, but when it affects the rights of others we need to seriously look at it."

It should come as no surprise that education is a top priority for Kranz, who teaches social studies at Spring Lake Park High School and serves on the House Early Childhood Learning and the Education Finance and Economic Competitiveness finance divisions. His wife, Kristi, also teaches social studies at the school.

"The reason I ran was primarily the lack of investment in our children from the womb up through paying college tuition," he said. "I've had many discussions with kids going into college, or considering college, and realistically not having a way to pay for it. That really bothers me. I saw some very bright kids from average or low-income families



Rep. Scott Kranz

DISTRICT 51A

2002 population: 36,756
Largest city: Blaine
County: Anoka
Top concerns: Education, affordable health care and property taxes

that didn't go to college because of the recent increases in tuition."

Serving as a union president and contract negotiator, Kranz also knows firsthand the impact of health care on a school district budget. He has also heard stories of small businesses losing good employees because they can't afford to offer benefits.

Like most members, his constituents see rising property taxes as a concern.

"The increases and the lack of state support for our services have really hit a lot of our homeowners," he said. "There are people that have grown up in that area that can't afford to retire in that area."

A viable rural lifestyle

Tschumper will work to make health care affordable

By **LEE ANN SCHUTZ**

Rep. Ken Tschumper (DFL-La Crescent) is one of a declining breed amongst members.

"I am the last dairy farmer," he may say in jest, but the state's declining dairy industry is no laughing matter to this farmer who lives on land his great-grandfather established in 1867. "In 1977, there were 30,000 dairy farms in the state, today there are 5,000," said Tschumper, who runs one of the 115 dairy farms left in Houston County.

Tschumper campaigned on issues that can make a rural lifestyle viable for the next generation of farmers and small businesses. But nothing can happen without affordable health care, he said.

"I can do more for rural families by

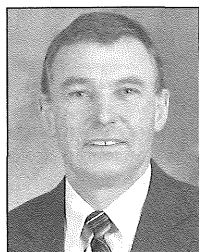
trying to do something to make health care affordable," he said. That's why he is happy with his assignment to the House Health and Human Services Committee.

"Huge numbers of people, farmers and business owners can no longer afford health care for their employees or themselves," Tschumper said, adding that highly educated spouses of farmers often work at a minimum wage job just to provide health care coverage for the family.

A supporter of universal health care, he said the affordability issue also affects health care providers and nursing homes.

He favors increasing the reimbursement to nursing homes, and says they play a very important role in small communities by providing employment and keeping the elderly close to their extended families.

Another key to a vibrant rural economy is quality education, he said. "People are not going to live in rural areas unless we have



Rep. Ken Tschumper

DISTRICT 31B

2002 population: 36,723
Largest city: La Crescent
Counties: Houston and Fillmore
Top concerns: Health care, education and economic development

good schools," he said, while emphasizing that health care, good schools and economic development are intertwined.

"If we can come up with health care solutions, it will make it possible for small businesses to locate in rural areas, provide employment and the tax base to support the schools. We have to move ahead on all three of these things."

Tschumper also serves on the House Housing Policy and Finance and Public Health Finance Division, House Ways and Means Committee, and is vice-chairman of the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs Committee.