

Flood relief

Special session delivers for Drazkowski's district

By Nick Busse

Former Rep. Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon), now the state's labor and industry commissioner, offered a word of advice to the man who

would succeed him as the state representative from District 28B: "Just stick to your values."

His successor, Rep. Steve Drazkowski (R-Wabasha), who was sworn in Aug. 16, 2007, said he's lived by the creed of "rural values" his whole life,

emphasizing hard work and community service. He intends to bring these values to the Capitol.

"I grew up on a beef farm and learned early about rural ethics and values ... and that's

really translated very well into my ability to connect and to relate well to our rural district," he said.

Drazkowski, a 42-year-old cable contractor who spent 14 years as an agent and educator with the University of Minnesota Extension Service, said he intends to deliver for his district, especially in the areas of property tax relief and rural transportation infrastructure.

He got the chance to deliver earlier than expected. When two days' worth of heavy rains caused major flood damage in southeast Minnesota in late-August, Drazkowski's district was among the hardest hit. On Sept. 11, 2007, the Legislature convened to approve a flood-relief package, and Drazkowski was able to spend his first night on the House floor helping his district recover from a natural disaster.

Drazkowski, whose father was a township

supervisor and county commissioner, has been an active member of the Republican Party, and in his youth spent many years with organizations like 4-H and Future Farmers of America. He said he felt like the time was right to "jump into the fray" of state politics.

A self-described "big outdoorsman," Drazkowski enjoys hunting and fishing in his spare time. He lives in Wabasha with his wife, Laura, and daughter, Kinsey.



Rep.
Steve Drazkowski

DISTRICT 28B

2002 Population: 36,528

Largest city: Goodview

Counties: Goodhue, Wabasha, Winona

Top concerns: Property tax relief and rural transportation infrastructure

Special session brings disaster relief

Less than a month after heavy rains resulted in rushing floodwaters creating a path of destruction through parts of southeast Minnesota, state lawmakers met in special session Sept. 11, 2007, to approve a stream of money to help several southeastern Minnesota communities rebuild.

Sponsored by Rep. Ken Tschumper (DFL-La Crescent) and Sen. Sharon Erickson Ropes (DFL-Winona), the \$157.3 million law includes state aid to seven counties that were designated federal disaster areas following the Aug. 18-19, 2007, storms. Seven people were killed, nearly 1,500 homes damaged and approximately 300 were destroyed.

Effective Sept. 13, 2007, the law provides \$72.3 million of state assistance from the General Fund and \$56 million in general obligation bonding. It also includes \$1 million from the petroleum tank release fund.

The allocations will assist with homeowner and business cleanup; the refurbishing or rebuilding of public infrastructure, including roads and bridges, school facilities cleanup,

repair or replacement; increased student transportation costs; student enrollment changes; replacing state facilities and restoration of natural resources; and help with historic structure cleanup and repair.

The law includes:

- \$51 million to replace roads and bridges;
- \$45 million for employment and economic development purposes;
- \$16 million in low-interest and forgivable loans to homeowners;
- \$4.2 million to repair and replace state facilities and restore area natural resources;
- \$1 million in property tax abatements for flooded homes and businesses;
- \$584,000 in education assistance to include school cleanup and repair, offset enrollment changes and to assist with increased student transportation costs;
- \$250,000 for historic site cleanup, repair and replacement costs; and
- \$100,000 for the Health Department to conduct indoor air quality investigations and sampling in public facilities and nonprofit organizations.

The law also provides \$3.7 million for "flood and drought recovery assistance to affected agricultural producers;" \$1 million to help Cook County and Grand Marais with costs associated with a fire in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness earlier in 2007; \$200,000 in fiscal years 2008 and 2009 to Crookston for flood recovery and mitigation issues; and \$100,000 in fiscal years 2008 and 2009 to Browns Valley to assist in recovery from a March 14, 2007, flood.

Further, the law includes \$2 million to provide a state match necessary to receive \$53.2 million in federal grants and aid for the Interstate 35W bridge collapse. It also prohibits insurance companies from stating or implying to a policyholder that filing a claim related to the bridge collapse could result in non-renewal or cancellation of that policy or future premium increases.

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— M. Cook