

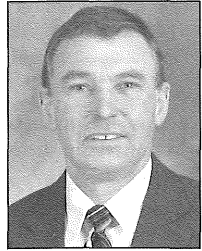
A viable rural lifestyle

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



Rep. Ken Tschumper

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

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.