

LOCALNEWS

Candidate Mills says he would better represent 8th District

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Stewart Mills has a lot in common with Rick Nolan. They both share a desire to represent the U.S. House's 8th District, which Nolan now does. Their campaigns are both headquartered in Brainerd, and Mills said there are many personal connections: his great-grandfather gave Nolan's grandfather his first job at the post office; Nolan's aunt was good friends with Mills' grandmother who lived across the street from one another; Nolan's wife's grandfather was Mills' grandfather's attorney; Mills' wife used to cocktail waitress with Nolan's daughter; and his brother is good friends with Nolan's son-in-law.

Mills said seeking the 8th District House position is not personal, but philosophical.

"There is a lot of connections between Rick and myself, but political philosophy is certainly not one of them," Mills said.

Nolan is the DFL-endorsed candidate, while Mills is the Republican candidate.

Mills, 42, visited International Falls Thursday to meet with supporters and tour several area businesses and talk about his candidacy.

"We want to meet folks and let the physical presence be on par with the media presence," he said over lunch with The Journal.

Mills said the people of the very rural and large, 18-county 8th District have some common challenges.



Stewart Mills

"It comes down to being able to operate your business or your farm, many of our family farmers are multigenerational businesses, without the interference of Washington D.C.," he said.

Mills, who has sought nor held no other elected office, said he was motivated to seek the position after being told in 2009 by a district aid of former Congressman Jim Oberstar "how the free market has no place in America's health care."

"That got me active," he said, adding Nolan has been honest with his ideas about health care reform focusing on socialized single-payer medicine.

He said when Nolan began talking about banning "guns that look scary" he made a video about the Second Amendment, which spurred a group of people asking him to run for office.

His family lives by the "hunting camp doctrine," which came from a hunting trip an 8-year old Mills took which his father.

"I complained about the food and my father took me aside and said if you complain about the food, you will get the job of being cook," he said.

"I have an opportunity to remove somebody who is abusing our vote (because his votes do not represent the 8th District's values)," he said. "It was time for me to get off the bench and do something about it."

Mills said he is not a career politician and favors term limits, similar to that of the president, for all federal elected offices.

"I am going to represent the values and priorities of our part of Minnesota," he said.

Issues

As he meets with people around the district, he said he's hearing concerns about changes proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency to the Clean Water Act "where all of a sudden their ditches or drain tiles now become regulated and they want to make sure regulatory agencies don't have carte blanche — where they get to come up with their own legislation and then be their judge, jury and executioner. They want to make sure that proposed regulations are approved and debated by their elected representatives in Congress."

The need for jobs in northern Minnesota is huge, he said. "We've giving much more preference to Wall Street than we have to main street," he said, adding Democrats are "at war with job creators" and trade policies must be adjusted to "make sure we're able to compete

on a level playing field with the rest of the world."

He said unemployment statistics don't tell the whole story because thousands of unemployed people have given up looking for work.

"We have employment opportunists we should more fully embrace," he said.

"Job creation on main street in mining and the timber industry is in my blood," he said. "We have to look toward making sure we have an economy that can foster that growth, but also not limit our timber industry from fully reaching its potential, but also making sure our mining industry is supported, but not handicapped by unnecessary hurdles and regulations. "

An energy policy that can facilitate a healthy and robust economy is crucial to the mining and timber industries, he said.

"When you look at the mining industry, the single largest unit of production is energy, so their biggest expense is power," he said.

Nolan supported an energy bill that included a carbon tax "that would absolutely kill our mining and timber industries because if you raise their cost of production... you're handicapping them and eventually putting them out of business," he said.

Mills said the Second Amendment right to bare arms is non-negotiable.

"We need to enforce the laws we currently have," he said. "Not foist laws upon Americans that would abridge their Second Amendment rights."

Mills serves as vice president of Mills Fleet Farm,

headquartered in Brainerd, and as administrator of the company's self-insured health plan. The Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare, needs to be "repealed and replaced with a patient-centered, market-driven solution," he said.

"Government control of the economy, socialism, doesn't work. They've taken over one-sixth of our economy through various mechanisms. Consumerism does work — when you put the power to make decisions in the hands of the individual — that is how the economy thrives and we haven't seen that in the medical economy."

Mills admits he's passionate about health care alternatives to Obamacare and said he's seen first-hand how Obamacare is impacting employees and their families.

"The purpose of health care reform is to increase access and bring down cost," he said. "By the Democrats' own admission, Obamacare has done the exact opposite."

Higher premiums, co-pays and deductibles have been a result of the Affordable Care Act, he said. "They are paying more and getting less," he said, adding projections show employees of small businesses will see a 40-50 percent increase in the cost of their premiums.

The inflation rate for medical services shouldn't grow faster than the rest of the economy, he said. He proposes buying and selling insurance across state lines, similar to how vehicle insurance works.

"We should put that same competition in our health care economy," he said.

"We should look at health savings accounts and make sure we can expand that... We should be looking at tort reform, and probably the biggest important thing we should look at is making sure there is transparency in the medical economy. You go to the doctor's office and you don't know the price of anything. You go to the pharmacist and they want to see your insurance card before they tell you the price of anything. We are really locked out of it."

Mills proposes, and has done in his company, creating an online tool, which helps people figure out the best prices.

"Put the price on it," he said. "If you were able to buy insurance more efficiently, you could put more in your health savings account."

Obamacare has expanded reliance on government by placing more people on Medicaid, he said.

"We should have been looking for free market alternatives to bring down cost and increase access, and strengthen our social safety net and legal protections," he said.

Mills said he's focused his campaign on three things: "Job creation, from main street on up, not from Washington D.C. or Wall Street on down; sticking up for our constitutional rights, whether it's making sure the EPA is controlled by Congress, not the EPA is off on their own and making sure our Second Amendment rights are not written on tissue paper, but in our Constitution; and making sure we get our health care reform right."

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