

Blue Earth County Board Primary

Edwards advocates innovation

By Dan Linehan

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MANKATO — Reggie Edwards says Minnesota's work ethic used to be enough to pull it through economic crises. No longer.

"That won't be sufficient.

There won't be enough workers," the Blue Earth County Board 2nd District candidate said. The 2nd District is comprised of Mankato north of Main Street, though there are some hilltop areas just south of that road in the district.

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EDWARDS: Citizen engagement must broaden

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Edwards said demographic data show more than two employees will leave for every one who enters during the next 10 to 15 years.

"We will be challenged more than any other time in history."

Edwards is a big-picture thinker and says tweaking the system won't work. The three pillars of his campaign, he says, will.

The first way forward is innovation, he said.

"It's not simply about subsidizing" but more about how to expand the tax base while reducing the demand for services like corrections and welfare programs.

If more cuts and efficiency gains aren't enough, then so-called "added value" is the future, he said. By that he means squeezing more worth from existing activities.

It might mean putting solar panels on county buildings or harvesting roadway grass for biofuel.

The need for innovation brings Edwards to his campaign's second pillar, which seeks to broaden citizen engagement.

Some of the creative solutions government will need will come from citizens.

Finally, Edwards said government collaboration will be necessary — and not the model where counties and cities are dependent on the state to keep their budgets in the black.

He acknowledged fears of the loss of identity in those mergers.

As far as the county budget, Edwards said there's not enough cutting or enough taxes that can make the long-term problems go away. "We have to have new ideas. That's why I focus on innovation."

Edwards has extensive experience in government (see accompanying box) and said he's a "public servant at heart."

"I also view the work as a responsibility and an obligation," he said. His mom worked three jobs with a seventh-grade education, he said, to help prepare him for opportunities like this.

Edwards said he will remain as executive director of the Region Nine Development Commission if elected. If elected officials had to be retired, then very few people could serve, he said.

"I can do both jobs well."

The primary will be held Aug. 10.

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