



A Day In The Life Of A State Representative
By Steve Doyle

As a State Representative, I often get some pretty unusual requests: fix a leaking toilet, test drive forestry equipment, and of course, the question every student asks when they come to the Capitol, how many light bulbs are in the building. But last week, I received the strangest, most intriguing request: blow up a creek.

That's right. Blow up a creek.

Now maybe for some of you, lodging explosives in a frozen creek bed to break up ice chunks to avoid flooding as the runoff begins to melt isn't something that far out of the ordinary. But for me, this whole experience was full of firsts. Here is how it all started.

I got a call from Chairman Rolly Bogert of the Town of Onalaska. It seems that Rolly had a pretty serious problem. Because of the extreme winter weather this year, a creek in Onalaska had frozen solid. The ice is now so thick that they could not chip it, break it or do anything to open the creek up to collect runoff water. When the spring thaw comes, and despite current temperatures I have been assured by Sun Prairie's own Jimmy the Groundhog that it is coming, the melting water will have nowhere to go. Nearby property was set to be flooded unless there was some way to break through all the solid ice. Rolly didn't know what he was going to do.

Enter the next player in this story, the attorney for the Town of Onalaska who works in Wausau. He told Rolly about this obscure, little known state statute that says you can blow up a creek in certain extreme situations. What extreme situations you might ask? Well log jams for one and, as it turns out, thick ice that can't be broken up any other way. So we were in business. The next step was to talk to the DNR to see if the Town could get permit to explode the creek. Sounds easy right?

Wrong. Over the past several days, my office has been on the phone with attorneys for the DNR, legislative liaisons, Western Wisconsin Water Conservation specialists and many others trying to see how we could blow up this creek and more importantly, who would get to do it. Turns out the statute wasn't too clear about who had the authority to "light the fuse." But we finally got it all straightened out.

Friday morning, a licensed blaster (which sounds like the best job in the world, next to State Representative of course) came on the scene. First, he did some exploratory boring to see how deep the ice really is and, I suppose, to determine where he needed to put the explosives. He also worked with the DNR and town officials to determine what parts of the creek exactly needed to be exploded in order for the creek to function as a runoff drain again. Then, they blew up the creek.

So if you heard a loud boom Friday, don't worry. It's just your friendly neighborhood state representative blowing up a creek to help out his constituents. And that has got to be the most unusual thing I have done in a long time.