

A new leader for a new majority

Kelliher pledges bipartisanship as she takes over as House speaker

By **PATTY OSTBERG**

In 1998 when House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher (DFL-Mpls) began campaigning for her district seat, she was frequently greeted by her constituents with, “You’re going to have some big shoes to fill.” They were referring to former House Speaker Dee Long (DFL-Mpls), who previously held the spot and was the first female House speaker in state history.

“I’m going to bring my own pair of shoes,” became Kelliher’s response.

From working for former House Speaker Bob Vanasek (DFL-New Prague) to helping override Gov. Jesse Ventura’s veto of a \$3 million allocation for the Guthrie Theater in 2000, Kelliher has walked miles in those shoes.

She began her political marathon in the 1980’s during Minnesota’s farm crisis.

As neighbors were forced off their lands due to falling land prices and rising farm debt, Kelliher remembers sitting across the dinner table looking in shock at her father. “I remember my dad crying,” because of the stress and the threat of losing their 70-head dairy farm, she said.

In response, she and her mother rode a school bus to the State Capitol for a farm rally. Sixteen at the time, she recalled a very cold day with people with their tractors and farm equipment lining the Capitol Mall and steps. The gathering fostered in her a sense of wanting to know who makes the types of decisions that affect people’s livelihoods.

Learning by listening

Eventually, the experience of working on a campaign during college led her to a job opportunity at the House with Vanasek. “There’s nothing like learning by doing,” she said, before adding, with a laugh, “(There are) things I wish I’d paid even more attention to.”

Vanasek felt like he made good hires, and trusted those he did, she said. Before he would ever tell an employee what he thought, he

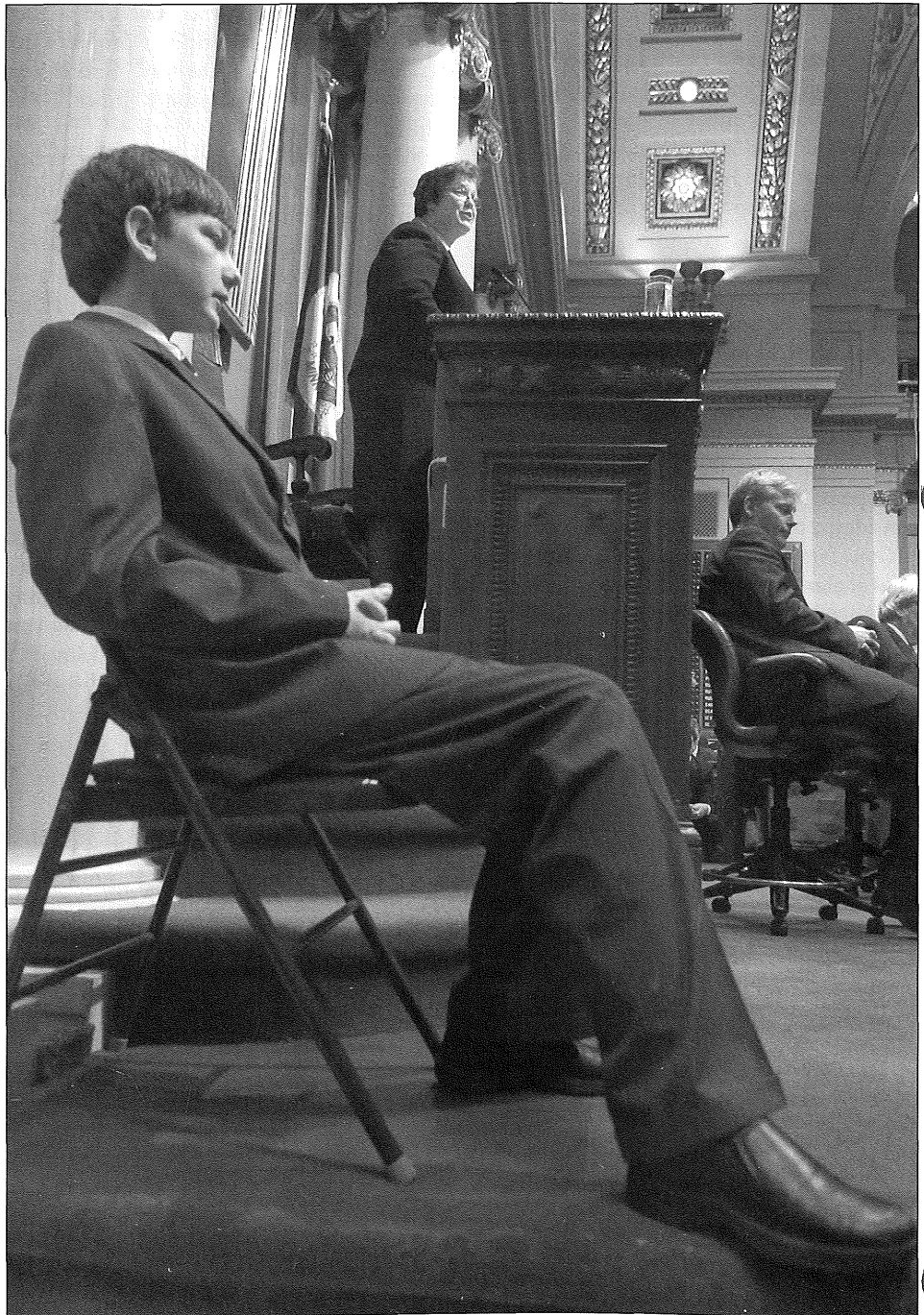


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Seated at the front desk of the House Chamber, Patrick Kelliher listens as his mother, House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher, addresses the other 133 House members Jan. 3.

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would ask what they thought about an issue. "Sometimes you didn't really know what to think," she explained, but he would listen.

Being a good listener is one skill she believes helped in her nomination as speaker. "I may not always agree completely, but I am willing to give people a fair hearing on their point of view or idea," she said.

Rep. Steve Simon (DFL-St. Louis Park) echoed that during her nomination.

"She leads by listening," and is not threatened by people who disagree with her. ... "The ability to listen is the mark of a true leader," he said.

She left the Legislature for neighborhood organizing, but not for long.

As the workload began to wind down, she received a phone call from then-Senate President Allan Spear (DFL-Mpls). An assistant to the president position opened, but she was reluctant to accept the offer with her 8-month-old daughter and 4-year-old son at home. Plus, she was contemplating her own

run for the House. Eventually she gave in and became responsible for bill referrals coming to the president's office.

In that role, she researched the history of bills, the jurisdictional home they were previously sent to and would assign bills to committees.

Applying her principles

These skills afforded her some know-how in creating the new, larger House committee structure for this session. Bill referral is unique to every leader in terms of where the leader wants things to go, Kelliher said.


The formulation of more committees brings together legislators from areas like education and health and human services to create quality discussion on how to better fund coexisting issues, she said. A thorough discussion engages new legislation to move forward, and "the body can respect the work of the committee a little more," Kelliher added.

As speaker, Kelliher is determined to work in a bipartisan way, while also addressing the so-called "bread and butter" issues. She said health care access and affordability, property tax relief, and a commitment to investing in education are highest in priority.

She also intends to meet often with the House Minority Leader Marty Seifert (R-Marshall).

"I think what she is doing is really terrific," Seifert said. "It's hard to throw bombs at people when you're talking to them on a regular basis."

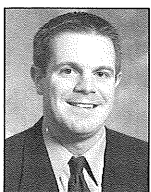
Constituents will see legislation passed early in the session, and not waiting until March as in previous years. Also gone will be the "cold and rigid partisanship of the past," she said during opening ceremonies.

Everyone is elected by their constituency around here, sometimes the Democrats come out on top, sometimes the Republicans, Kelliher said. We serve our constituents better when we do the legislating in a way that brings us together, working on their behalf. 

New leadership for the House



Speaker of the House
Margaret Anderson Kelliher
(DFL-Mpls)



Majority Leader
Tony Sertich
(DFL-Chisholm)



Minority Leader
Marty Seifert
(R-Marshall)

Assistant Majority Leader
Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park)

Assistant Majority Leader
Tina Liebling (DFL-Rochester)

Assistant Majority Leader
Frank Moe (DFL-Bemidji)

Assistant Majority Leader
Mike Nelson (DFL-Brooklyn Park)

Assistant Majority Leader
Aaron Peterson (DFL-Appleton)

Assistant Majority Leader
Steve Simon (DFL-St. Louis Park)

Deputy Minority Leader
Tom Emmer (R-Delano)

Minority Whip
Denny McNamara (R-Hastings)

Assistant Minority Leader
Laura Brod (R-New Prague)

Assistant Minority Leader
Brad Finstad (R-Comfrey)

Assistant Minority Leader
Dean Simpson (R-Perham)

Assistant Minority Leader
Kurt Zellers (R-Maple Grove)

Assistant Minority Whip
Mike Beard (R-Shakopee)

Assistant Minority Whip
Joyce Peppin (R-Rogers)

Assistant Minority Whip
Matt Dean (R-Dellwood)

Assistant Minority Whip
Neil W. Peterson (R-Bloomington)

Assistant Minority Whip
Tony Cornish (R-Good Thunder)