

# Sekhon focuses on education, environment issues

After two years of watching from the sideline, Rep. Kathleen Sekhon (DFL-Burns Township) has returned to the House with idealism tempered by realism.



Rep. Kathleen Sekhon

Sekhon, who served one term in the House before a 1994 election defeat, still has many of the same concerns as during her first term. However, she acknowledges that she has a different outlook from when she arrived at the

Capitol to begin her first term.

“Certainly, I come with a more realistic picture of what can happen and what I can accomplish,” Sekhon said. “You could easily work around the clock for six months and still not do everything worthwhile. My goal is to try to streamline the process, based on what I learned three and four years ago, so that I can make the best use of my time.”

After losing her seat to Republican Tom Hackbarth, of Cedar, Minn., in 1994, Sekhon returned to her career as a teacher, working as a substitute mainly at the middle school level, and remained involved in several community groups.

As the 1996 election approached, there was little doubt about Sekhon’s intentions.

“The issues that were of top concern to me are continuing issues,” she said. “We need to have committed people who are willing to work hard if we are going to accomplish the things that we need to accomplish. It was clear to me that I was going to run again.”

Sekhon regained her House seat in a closely fought rematch with Hackbarth. It was her second victory in four consecutive campaigns for the House.

The oldest of seven children, Sekhon grew up in Pipestone, Minn., and received a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from the University of Minnesota-Duluth. She is married and has three children, all in college.

Sekhon’s political life began in 1980, when she attended her first precinct caucus. She wound up being a delegate to the state DFL convention that year, which led her to further involvement in the party and in other political organizations. She served as co-chair of the DFL Platform and Issues Commission from 1984 to 1990, when she launched her first campaign for office.

Issues such as education funding, environmental protection, and workplace safety make up the core of Sekhon’s legislative agenda.

This year, she has been named vice chair of the Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee, and she also is a member of a separate environment policy committee.

From those positions, Sekhon plans to be a voice for groundwater protection, waste reduction, and improved waste management. Her take on environmental issues focuses on the long-term implications of current policies and practices.

“We need to consider the future costs of what we are doing today,” she said. “I want to look to the future when we’re making our policy decisions.”

Education funding and property tax reform are two issues that go hand-in-hand, according to Sekhon. She would like to see significant changes to address both problem areas.

“We need to change the way we fund our schools,” she said. “I’d love to see 100 percent state funding and no dependence on residential property taxes.

“I don’t know that we’re going to be able to get to that point, but I think more and more legislators are realizing that the property tax is not the best way for us to be funding schools.”

The forecast \$1.4 billion surplus in state coffers provides a rare chance to make significant changes, Sekhon said, and that provides her additional reason for optimism as returns to the House.

“When I was here last time, it was during the shortfall period,” she said. “It’s going to be very exciting working at a time when we do have a good economic forecast, when it looks like we have some money we can use for critical investments like education.”

Sekhon heads into her second term with a clear message from her constituents, a group she believes to include an unusually large number of independent voters with little interest in partisan politics.

“They want work done. They don’t want bickering and partisan attacks,” Sekhon said. “That’s very counterproductive, and I don’t think it will be tolerated by the people in my district.”

—Nick Healy

## District 50A

**1996 population:** 37,063

**Largest city:** East Bethel

**County:** Anoka

**Location:** northern metropolitan area

**Top concern:** “People in my district are concerned about a whole range of issues. I think they want government that is efficient and effective. For the most part, I think people in the district realize that we do have shared responsibilities and that government is the way that we can get the things done that are best done together, like educating our children.

—Rep. Kathleen Sekhon