

# A fresh perspective

## Sieben says her youth is an asset as a new legislator in finding new ways to solve state concerns

By MICHELLE KIBIGER

Given her family tree, it may not be a surprise that Rep. Katie Sieben (DFL-Newport) decided to run for the House of Representatives. Her father, Mike, served in the House from 1973 to 1982 and uncle, Harry, was Speaker of the House for several years in the early 1980s.



Rep. Katie Sieben

But Katie Sieben, who was 5 when her father finished his tenure in the

House, says she wasn't looking to hold public office. She was enjoying serving the public as a member of U.S. Sen. Mark Dayton's staff.

An open seat presented an opportunity she felt she couldn't let pass her by.

"Running for office wasn't something that was on the forefront of my mind," said Sieben, who celebrates her 26th birthday March 23. "So then when the seat opened up people started talking to me about it, I figured this was a once in a lifetime opportunity where this is an open seat in the town where I'm from."

Sieben has lived her entire life in District 57A, with the exception of a few years away at Colorado College and in Washington, D.C. working for Dayton. She says that knowledge of the district gives her a good perspective on the issues that concern residents.

High among those concerns are education and property taxes.

Constituents perceive that many students are receiving decreased educational opportunities, either because their families can't afford the costs of extra-curricular activities or because of decreased course offerings, she said. It also seems, she said, that the education students are getting in the public schools is not as high quality.

"I'm afraid that the education that I got less than 10 years ago in public schools is not the

same as kids today are being offered," she said.

As for property taxes, Sieben said she's concerned about the affect local government aid cuts may have to three communities in her district: Newport, St. Paul Park, and South St. Paul. She said many of the homes in the area did not benefit as much from property tax relief laws in the past few years, and now their taxes may increase to cover the lost state aid.

"I'm really concerned about property taxes going up," she said. "It's forcing our seniors especially, or people on fixed incomes, out of their homes. So that's something that I want to call attention to and work on proposals that make it more easy for people to stay in their homes and try to mitigate the affects of property tax increases."

Sieben serves on both the House

trying to learn about the tax structure," Marko said. "I really respect and admire somebody who really wants to get in there and learn as much as they can."

Marko also said that Sieben exhibited the ability to connect with people on the campaign trail, particularly because of her age. "One of the best parts was seeing how she could really invigorate the young people at getting involved in politics and relating the importance of that to them," Marko said.

Sieben views her youth as a way to bring a different perspective to the Legislature. She said she and other younger colleagues have the opportunity to look toward the future and determine what they hope the landscape of education, communities, transportation, and other facets of public life will be like for future generations.

"I think being younger," Sieben said, "I can bring a different perspective perhaps just because of when I grew up."

She's also been spending a lot of time reaching out to groups of students and young girls to help interest them in the Legislature and the legislative process. She recently sponsored a

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Transportation Policy and Taxes committees.

From the perspective of a first-term legislator, Sieben is enjoying the experience as a way to learn much more about the legislative process and convey that to her constituents. From her experience in Sen. Dayton's office, she said, she learned that it's key to build good relationships with colleagues to help get things done.

"I can be a voice for the people in my district and speak up about things that I feel are important," she said.

Sen. Sharon Marko (DFL-Cottage Grove), who formerly represented Sieben's district in the House, said she admires Sieben's drive and ambition. New legislators often have a great deal of new information to understand and may not ask to tackle complicated issues such as taxes.

"She's diving in with both feet and really

girls' day at the Capitol.

Said Marko, "I think the young people of Minnesota have a wonderful role model."

### DISTRICT 57A

**2002 population:** 36,710

**Largest city:** Cottage Grove

**Counties:** Dakota, Washington

**Location:** southeastern Twin Cities suburbs

**Top concern:** "I'm really concerned about property taxes going up. Really, I just see it as a shift onto the community — communities that are least able to afford it are going to bear the brunt of it."

— Rep. Katie Sieben