

Less of a learning curve

Anderson goes from staff member to House member

By CRAIG GREEN

For most freshmen representatives, there is a period of adjustment when they begin working at the State Office Building. They



Rep. Sarah Anderson from the Capitol.

Anderson worked as a legislative assistant, a committee administrator, was an executive assistant to former House Speaker Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon) for six years, and she oversaw many legislative assistants.

While growing up, it was routine for Anderson and her family to discuss politics. These early conversations motivated her to

have new offices and staff, rules of protocol to learn for drafting legislation and etiquette for floor sessions. Not so for Rep. Sarah Anderson (R-Plymouth), a 10-year veteran of working across the street

learn more about the political process and get involved. This led her to the University of Minnesota-Duluth, where she majored in political science and sociology, and met her husband, Paul. Once out of college, she worked in the private sector, before coming to work at the House.

Anderson said she represents “a unique district. We’re a growing community with young families and a growing diverse population.”

This growth means transportation is a “huge issue” for her district.

Four heavily traveled roadways — Highways 55 and 169, and Interstates 394 and 494 — either go through or border her district, causing major traffic congestion. Anderson wants to work together to find a way to improve this situation, and find ways to improve the transportation system for Minnesota as a whole. “I am passionate about working in a bipartisan manner with other legislators to

DISTRICT 43A

2002 population: 36,957

Largest city: Plymouth

County: Hennepin

Top concerns: Property taxes, education and transportation

get the job done,” said Anderson.

Other topics of concern include property tax relief and education.

Anderson will directly address these issues on the committees she serves, including the House Commerce and Labor Committee, the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee, and the House Property Tax Relief and Local Sales Tax Division.

A veteran observer of the process, Anderson is excited about her new role. “I’m the eternal optimist. I’m looking forward to having the opportunity to sit down in the committee process and work through these ideas, and figure out what’s the best solution for the citizens of Minnesota. That’s exciting to me.”

Education still top priority

Former teacher Benson wants to see improvements

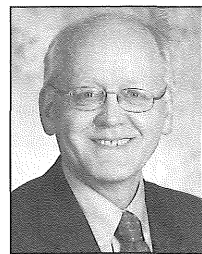
By SONJA HEGMAN

Rep. John Benson’s (DFL-Minnetonka) political roots run deep.

His ancestors, former Republicans, were active participants in the Farmer-Labor movement. His uncle traveled with former President Theodore Roosevelt to inspect the Panama Canal. His parents had many political discussions at the dinner table when

Benson was growing up. And Benson himself had several conversations with Hubert Humphrey.

Originally from Montana, Benson’s family saw good times and bad. His father was a big poker player and, family rumor has it, this kept the family afloat. A lover of card games as well, Benson enjoys the game bridge because



Rep. John Benson

“you psych out your opponent and it helps stave off Alzheimer’s disease.”

A retired high school teacher, Benson taught language arts, social studies and economics during his 34-year career in Edina. He was recruited for that teaching position, and considers his election to the House as the first job interview he has ever had.

Since his retirement in 1999, he has volunteered many hours to campaigns. When freezes and cutbacks on education funding occurred in 2003, Benson became frustrated with the Legislature.

“I was unable to shut up,” he said. “That’s why I ran.”

Benson won the seat held for nine terms by a Republican, Ron Abrams, who was appointed to a judgeship last year.

Education is a top concern in Benson’s district. The Hopkins School District is in a statutory operating debt, meaning it has spent more money than it has and does not have a

DISTRICT 43B

2002 population: 36,921

Largest city: Plymouth

County: Hennepin

Top concerns: Education, property tax relief and health care

reserve budget, a violation of state law, he said. A neighborhood school was closed because of this as a way to offset some of the district’s costs. Benson does not want other schools to close in his district, he said, and wants to see a change in the way education is funded.

“I’m interested in the education of every kid in the state,” Benson said. “Our kids are the future. We need to invest in them.”

Benson is very optimistic about his first session, and said people in both caucuses can see “we need to move” on various issues. He’s also interested to see what will be decided with the budget surplus.

“It’s tough to make a buck, and we shouldn’t just spend because we have it,” he said.