

# Always looking to help others

Allen brings her fight for social and economic justice to the House

By MIKE COOK

**B**efore she was a teenager, Rep. Susan Allen (DFL-Mpls) knew she wanted to fight for social and economic justice.

Throughout her personal life and professional career, Allen has done that. Now, she'll do it under the Capitol dome.

Allen won a Jan. 10 special election to replace former Rep. Jeff Hayden (DFL-Mpls), who replaced the retiring Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Mpls).

A self-described political newcomer, Allen follows a family tradition of activism. She has spent a decade or more on the boards of the ICWA Law Center,

Indigenous Peoples Task Force and the Indian Neighborhood Club on Alcohol and Drugs. The daughter of an Episcopal priest, she said her parents worked hard to change how the church administered its ministries to American Indians throughout the country.

"I grew up moving a lot because my parents didn't want anything to be about them; they wanted to go into a place and organize and move on to the next place," said Allen,

who grew up during a time of political and social change for American Indians. "By the time I was 14 years old, I'd gone to about 20 different schools in five or more states."

Professionally, Allen is a law firm partner who specializes in tax and tribal law. "I've been very lucky to be able to do what I love to do, and what I've wanted to do from a young age," she said. "I've been representing tribes for 14 years. I was general counsel on a variety of matters."

Allen is the first American Indian woman to serve in the Minnesota House. It is a role that she embraces.

"It's about integration, it's not about assimilation," Allen said. "I think it's important that I reflect the diversity of our community in south Minneapolis. ... I realize how important or historic this is in the sense that when young children come to the Capitol and they look at the pictures, they will see somebody who looks like them."

Among her priorities for the 2012 session are addressing the education achievement gap, job training, tax reform and affordable health care for all.

Allen is the second openly gay member to serve in the House, joining Rep. Karen Clark (DFL-Mpls). She plans on fighting hard to defeat the proposed constitutional amendment to constitutionally define marriage between one man and one woman.

"It's really about writing discrimination into our constitution," she said.



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Rep. Susan Allen, the newest member of the Minnesota House of Representatives, is welcomed on the House floor by her colleagues Jan. 24.

## DISTRICT 61B

Population (2009 est.): 35,842

Largest City: Minneapolis

County: Hennepin

Top concerns: Closing the achievement gap, job training, tax reform and affordable health care for all