

New members . . .

## Early Taft visit inspires Erickson's political career

By Nicole Wood

Newly elected Rep. Sondra Erickson (R-Princeton) has been a Republican since she was 10 years old growing up in Taft, N.D.

Her political awakening occurred in 1952 when the late President William Taft's son, U.S. Sen. Robert Taft, came through town. The younger Taft was seeking the GOP nomination for president, and he had vowed to visit every town named Taft in the country. Erickson's Taft was the smallest — population seven, with one sibling on the way.

Dwight Eisenhower got the nod from the Republican Party and went on to win the presidential election that year, but Taft's visit had a lasting effect on Erickson.

"That was my first real knowledge that there was a political process," she said. "My parents had already been proclaiming themselves Republicans, but it was my introduction to politics."

Erickson maintained her ties to the Republican Party when she grew up and moved to Princeton, Minn. Her first real campaign work, she said, was for John Zwach's congressional campaign in the 1960s. Zwach happens to be the father of one of Erickson's new House colleagues, Rep. Barb Sykora (R-Excelsior).

More recently, Erickson managed all four of former state Rep. LeRoy Koppendray's House campaigns.

"The experience of running his campaigns was absolutely essential," she said. "It paid off."

Erickson is quick to credit her predecessor and the supporters they had gathered over the years for their assistance in what was a whirlwind campaign — she had less than a month to get organized and to campaign before the Jan. 6 special election.

"I spent my holiday door knocking," Erickson said.

The decision to run for the District 17A House seat was by no means an easy one, Erickson said, because of her commitment to Princeton High School, where she teaches English, advises the school newspaper, and oversees the yearbook staff.

She has taken a leave of absence, she said, but with so many responsibilities, it has been difficult for her to wrap up things at the high school.

"It has been my life to teach, and I love it," she said. "I teach with a passion."

Rep. Erickson brings this enthusiasm for teaching to the House Education Committee, where she hopes to continue down the path toward increased accountability and emphasis on outcomes.

"It's so important, having been in the classroom for 30 years, that we all know, whether we're teachers, parents, or communities, that our children are learning something that they can take with them in life," she said. "The community at large has found out in employing and further educating our students that they are not at the standard they expect. Thus, we started this reformation."

Erickson's legislative agenda isn't limited to education. She also serves on the Regulated Industries and Energy Committee and the Economic Development and International

Trade Committee and its Housing and Housing Finance Division.

In language typical of a teacher, Erickson said she did her "homework" immediately after the election, and already she is sponsoring several bills. She hopes to address other key legislative topics, such as animal feedlots, soon.

Erickson adamantly opposes a proposed moratorium on feedlots in the state.

"I don't want to see the family farmer face another roadblock," she said.

She also has definite ideas about what to do with the state's projected \$1.3 billion budget surplus.

"I would like to see the surplus given back to the people," she said. "That means property tax reform and possible income tax reform."

Erickson said she comes from a "property poor" district.

"Property tax reform is major in District 17A because we have little to no industry, a low tax base, and a lot of land that is tax-free because it is a reservation," she said. "I would hope that eventually the Legislature would understand that there are some districts that face that dilemma."



Rep. Sondra Erickson

### District 17A

**1995 population:** 35,100  
**Largest city:** Princeton  
**Counties:** Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison  
**Location:** east-central Minnesota  
**Top concern:** "To continue to promote quality education in Minnesota that has accountability."

— Rep. Sondra Erickson

### Frequently called numbers

**Secretary of the Senate**  
231 Capitol ..... 296-0271  
Voice mail/order bills ..... 296-2343  
**Chief Clerk of the House**  
211 Capitol ..... 296-2314  
**Index, Senate**  
110 Capitol ..... 296-2887  
**Index, House**  
211 Capitol ..... 296-6646  
**Information, Senate**  
231 Capitol ..... 296-0504  
**Information, House**  
175 State Office Building ..... 296-2146  
**Committee Hotline, Senate** ... 296-8088

**Committee Hotline, House** .... 296-9283  
**Sergeant at Arms, Senate**  
Senate Chamber ..... 296-7159/6-1119  
**Sergeant at Arms, House**  
45 State Office Building ..... 296-4860  
**Counsel and Research, Senate**  
G-17 Capitol ..... 296-4791  
**Research, House**  
600 State Office Building ..... 296-6753  
**Legislative Reference Library**  
645 State Office Building ..... 296-3398  
**Revisor of Statutes**  
700 State Office Building ..... 296-2868

**Governor's Office**  
130 Capitol ..... 296-3391  
**Attorney General's Office**  
102 Capitol ..... 296-6196  
**Secretary of State's Office**  
180 State Office Building ..... 296-9208  
**Capitol Security**  
B-4 Capitol ..... 296-6741  
**Emergency** ..... 296-2100  
**TTY\*, Senate** ..... 296-0250  
Toll free ..... 1-888-234-1216  
**TTY\*, House** ..... 296-9896  
Toll free ..... 1-800-657-3550