

Kelliher brings unusual mix of rural, urban experience

By Grant Martin

Rep. Margaret Anderson Kelliher's idea of a vacation during the 1998 campaign might not sound relaxing to everyone. She spent the last



Rep. Margaret Anderson Kelliher

week in July bicycling 300 miles across Minnesota with family members to raise money to fight multiple sclerosis.

Kelliher (DFL-Mpls), whose sister-in-law has multiple sclerosis, logged over a thousand miles of training for the ride sponsored by the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Minnesota. She said that the hours of training gave her time to reflect.

"For me, it was really precious alone time," she said. "I would often just bike by myself. I could think about issues a lot, and I would spend time thinking about things in general. It was really a nice break."

Kelliher lives in the Bryn Mawr neighborhood of Minneapolis with her husband David and their two young children. She has worked as a neighborhood activist for the neighborhood association and also as a staff person in both the House and Senate.

In addition to cycling, Kelliher also enjoys writing creative nonfiction. She has had several essays published, including an essay about growing up on a Blue Earth County dairy farm during the farm crisis of the early 1980s.

"That was a huge experience to go through that turbulent time in the farm economy," she said. "Actually my family was able to make it through it, but it was never quite the same in the sense of farming."

Kelliher said that those experiences taught her how public policy can affect people's lives. And she said it makes the current farm crisis debate very real for her.

"Here, when we are talking about farm policy, I feel very connected to people who are in crisis," she said. "For some people, it's the second time that they've gone through a crisis because they went through the crisis in the '80s."

Kelliher's work as a neighborhood activist gave her an opportunity to get to know the issues affecting her district.

"It was a really great way to learn about issues by dealing with them on the front end," she said. "I'd deal with a lot of issues that would then go to the city council, the park board, or over here to the Legislature."

While working for the neighborhood association, Kelliher helped to develop a home improvement loan program and initiatives to connect neighborhood residents with local educational opportunities.

Kelliher also acted as a liaison between the neighborhood and the state Department of Transportation on the Interstate 394 expansion.

She said that transportation and transit issues will be among her main interests while serving in the House.

"It seems like a funny thing to be passionate about in some ways," she said. "But I really have a passion for finding ways to do transportation and transit funding that work for the parties that need it to work for them."

Kelliher said that she is encouraged by Gov. Jesse Ventura's approach to transportation and is happy with the appointments of Ted Mondale as chair of the Metropolitan

Council and Elwyn Tinklenberg as commissioner of transportation.

"I think that the governor is moving in the right direction," she said. "He's giving it a lot of attention, and I really applaud him for that."

Kelliher won the seat vacated by former Rep. Dee Long, the first woman to serve as speaker of the Minnesota House. Kelliher said that following a 20-year veteran presents some unique challenges, but she has a plan to overcome them.

"I think that what I've been focusing on as the new person in the district is really connecting with constituents and listening to them very earnestly about their concerns and being responsive to them," she said. "And I think that will help in the transition time."

Kelliher said that like Long she hopes to concentrate on a few issues, such as transportation, that will define her own legacy in the House.

"When I was door-knocking, people would say that I had some pretty big shoes to fill," she said. "I'd say that I plan on bringing my own pair of shoes."

District 60A

1995 population: 32,261

City: Minneapolis

County: Hennepin

Location: inner city

Top concern: "Transportation and transit are very important issues for the district and for me personally. I feel a real connection to those."

— Rep. Margaret Anderson Kelliher

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