

Renewable energy advocate

Knuth proud of her accomplishments in the House

By Bob Geiger

Redistricting mapped the decision by Rep. Kate Knuth (DFL-New Brighton) to step down from the House after three terms.

"When the maps came out, it made me reassess my direction. I never planned on being a legislator for my career," said Knuth, whose District 50B was changed dramatically, and paired her with Rep. Tom Tillberry (DFL-Fridley).

A conservation biologist, Knuth recently finished her doctoral coursework and is starting work on her thesis while coordinating the Boreas Environmental Leadership Program at the University of Minnesota's Institute on the Environment.

An environmental advocate, Knuth said, "I came in wanting to get good work done, and within a few months of getting elected, we passed the renewable energy standard," which requires state electric utilities to generate 25 percent of power from renewable resources by 2025.

Other significant renewable energy laws passed in 2007 included the Next Generation Energy Act and the Midwestern Greenhouse Gas Reduction Accord. "We were really making great progress," Knuth said.

However, since the 2010 election that gave Republicans control of the House and Senate, she said, "It's been very frustrating to see a shift from an, 'OK, we're going to create opportunity for this state by solving this problem'" attitude to climate and energy becoming political "wedge" issues.

Part of that legislative change is a focus on issues that divide rather than bring Minnesotans together, said Knuth, citing the proposed constitutional amendment defining marriage. "I don't really think it's good for the civic fabric of Minnesota for people to have to choose sides on issues that really don't impact the basic day-to-

day governance and future of the state."

The legislation Knuth is most proud of is the Toxic Free Kids Act, which requires the Department of Health to create lists of "chemicals of high concern" and "priority chemicals" that can harm children. Passed in 2009, that law also requires the Pollution Control Agency to recommend safer alternatives to priority chemicals.

"I'm really proud of a number of energy bills that I either authored or worked on that I think put Minnesota on a renewable

energy path," said Knuth. She advised the legislators who end up serving the New Brighton, Arden Hills and Shoreview after this fall's election to work hard to represent the communities.

"Being an advocate for my community has been something I'm proud of. I think it's a good legislator who works hard to open up the office for their constituents, and I worked really hard to be out in the community; door-to-door, surveys and meetings. I helped people who have not really been part of this process to access it in different ways," Knuth said.

She will miss people, colleagues and staff the most after her term ends.

"I love that I can walk around in my community and every two blocks point to a house and tell you about the person who lives there. There's not another job where you get to know the people in your community that well. The retired men who sit in the coffee shop next to my house; the manager of the Cub Foods in New Brighton; or the director of the high school marching band who was director when I was drum major," she said.

When Knuth leaves the House, the 134-member body also will lose the color orange.

"It's my favorite color and I've worn orange every day since I was in high school. I had two orange prom dresses made specially when I was in high school, because you couldn't buy them at the time," Knuth said.

"People know it. It's my brand. My constituents know it; my colleagues know it; people link to me when they see orange." ☈



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

After three terms, Rep. Kate Knuth announced she will not seek re-election.