

Youthful enthusiasm

For Bigham, value of public service instilled at an early age

By **PATTY OSTBERG**

Glancing over the resume of Rep. Karla Bigham (DFL-Cottage Grove), one might not suspect she is only 27 years old.



Rep. Karla Bigham

She served the last two years on the Cottage Grove City Council; previously, she was a union organizer for Service Employees International Union and also worked as a DFL caucus researcher and assistant. For the past three years, she worked as a paralegal for the Property Crimes Division of the Hennepin County Attorney's Office.

Bigham said being a public servant is the highest calling a person can achieve.

"Knowing I have vested interest in the future" of Minnesota and the country helped motivate her political pursuits, she said.

Her parents instilled these social values starting at a young age. She remembers the family sitting in front of the television watching the president's State of the Union Address to "hear what our president was doing."

She ran for the House after seeing the effects of increased property taxes and decreased local government aid in Cottage Grove. Bigham said she felt the need to bring her city-level experience to the state level.

The issues she "campaigns on and will work tirelessly on" include education, transportation and health care, she said. A key transportation initiative that Bigham will try to secure more funding for is the Red Rock Corridor transitway, a proposed commuter rail line that would run from Hastings to St. Paul on existing rail lines.

Bigham has a passion for all her committee assignments: the Game, Fish and Forestry Division of the House Environment and

DISTRICT 57A

2002 population: 36,710
Largest city: Cottage Grove
Counties: Washington, Dakota
Top concerns: Property tax relief and stable, consistent funding for schools.

Natural Resources Committee, the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee, two public safety and state government finance divisions of the House Finance Committee, and the Veterans Affairs Division of the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Committee.

In Cottage Grove, Bigham said she "was a fierce advocate for the public safety department." For example, she worked with other councilors and organizations to restore the city's K-9 unit after several years of absence.

"I was born and raised to really pay attention to what goes on in society ... to know what to do to make things better," she said. "I look forward to a productive session."