

**Bean off to D.C. as freshman with GOP target on her back**

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When freshman Democratic U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean raises her right hand to take the oath of office for the first time today, she might want to look over her shoulder, as well.

Republicans will be gunning for the Barrington Democrat after she scored perhaps the biggest House upset in the nation last November, unseating 35-year Republican incumbent Phil Crane in the 8th Congressional District.

The GOP plans to set up a campaign office as early as the spring to keep tabs on Bean in an effort to reclaim what was long thought of as a solid Republican district.

"This will undoubtedly be one of the top targets in the country," said John McGovern, spokesman for Republican House Speaker Dennis Hastert's Keep Our Majority political action committee.

Bean's response isn't quite of the bring-it-on variety, but she said she's aware she's a target.

"I ran on accountability. That's what it should be about," said Bean, a 42-year-old technology marketing consultant.

For this week anyway, Bean plans to soak up an experience that few Americans get to enjoy: being sworn in as a member of Congress.

"I'm excited. I'm very humbled at the same time," she said. "I'm also eager to roll up my sleeves and get going."

Her husband, Alan, will be present along with daughters Victoria, 13, and Michelle, 11, who attend Prairie Middle School in Barrington. Bean's siblings, nieces and nephews will be on hand, too, along with some campaign volunteers.

Ironically, after taking the oath of office as a group with the other congressmen, Bean will be sworn in again individually by Hastert, who'd rather see her serve only one term.

After the pomp and circumstance, Bean and her family will hop on a train for a quick trip to colonial Williamsburg to get to know the other 39 freshmen and their families.

Bean will be living with 12-year-veteran U.S. Rep. Carolyn Maloney of New York and fellow freshman Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida, both Democrats, in a townhouse a couple blocks from the Capitol. She was prepared to live out of a hotel for a while because she hadn't had time to look for an apartment when the offer to rent a room in the townhouse came along. She took it sight unseen.

Where Bean is living back home continues to be an issue. Her house is 1,400 feet outside the 8th District boundaries - lines redrawn that way in 2001 by Crane operatives looking to squeeze out future challengers.

Bean said it's "absolutely not required" by law that she move inside the district's boundaries to serve. She also pointed out Crane used the lives-out-of-district issue to attack her during the campaign and lost. Bean said a move is not something she's thinking about yet.

Republicans already plan to make it one of their top issues.

"I don't think people will understand that," said Cook County Republican Chairman Gary Skoien of Inverness. "She's getting paid to be a congressman. People often move for their jobs."

Bean also raised a few eyebrows for hiring as her chief of staff John Gonzalez, who worked in the same role for outgoing Texas Congressman Chris Bell. He's the Democrat who filed the ethics complaint against Hastert's No. 2, GOP House Leader Tom DeLay.

Bean said she picked Gonzalez because of his experience on Capitol Hill and business background, not his former boss' partisanship. She said her district director back in Illinois knows the Northwest suburbs from serving as her campaign manager.

Republicans already are seizing on the chief of staff issue, too.

"Unfortunately for Ms. Bean, every step she's taken to date indicates she's more interested in playing partisan politics than representing the district in which she's been elected," McGovern said.

Mostly though, Republicans will be watching how Bean votes.

"She will contribute to her own defeat in 2006 if she allies herself with the liberal Democratic leadership in the House instead of trying to be a reassuring voice for her more conservative constituents," McGovern said.

Bean said she's a mother and business owner and her constituents can identify with her.

"I don't have to change who I am to be representative of this district," she said. "When have you ever seen me spouting off on issues like a partisan? People are tired of the partisanship. Why would I go to Washington and reinvent myself?"

President Bush's agenda this year will put Bean to the test as she tries to balance her political views with those of her district.

Tax cuts are a high priority, and Bean's views on the Bush tax cuts were ever-evolving during the campaign.

Social Security reform allowing workers to divert part of their payroll taxes into private investment accounts is another top Bush goal, and Bean said she "has some concern" about privatization.

Like many others in Congress, Bean wants to know what percentage and what kind of investments will be allowed. She's also concerned about the idea of going from a guaranteed-benefit system to one with more risks, asking what happens "if that private investment doesn't pan out."

Overall, Bean plans to employ the same strategy in office that helped her win election.

"Essentially I'm going to keep the commitments I made during the campaign, be there out in the district," she said. "Demonstrate the same work ethic as I did on the campaign trail. I think it will be a stark contrast (to Crane)."

McGovern notes that Bean won't have Crane to kick around in 2006. "It will be a referendum on Melissa Bean," he said. "As she proved during the campaign, she lacks coherent positions on major issues and ran a campaign based more on personality and her perceptions of the flaws of the incumbent."

One of Bean's early mentors, Democratic U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky of Evanston, said it would be a mistake for Republicans to think Bean won solely due to Crane's vulnerability.

"I think they're missing some of the voting changes in (Northwest) Cook County," said

Schakowsky of the Democratic inroads.

Nor is Bean's situation the same as the one the GOP often cites when pointing to one-termers: Republican Michael Flanagan, who in 1994 defeated the eventually jailed Chicago Democrat Dan Rostenkowski but lost two years later, Schakowsky argued. "That was pretty much exclusively a repudiation of Rostenkowski. Bean is a good fit for her district," she said.

Schakowsky, the chief House Democratic whip and one of its more liberal members, said she expects Bean will vote with Republicans sometimes.

"She's her own person. She's going to vote her own way," Schakowsky said. "I think she knows exactly what it's going to take to stay there."

Before Bean starts thinking about the never-ending campaign that is life for House members, all of whom serve two-year terms, she just wants to find out what committees she'll serve on.

"Like every other freshman, think big and ask big and expect less," she said.

So Bean, like her colleagues, is hoping for a prime slot on Ways and Means, an appropriations panel or the Energy and Commerce committee, with financial services and transportation spots also high on her list.

For now, she's working out of Crane's old Palatine office on Northwest Highway as she finalizes her new offices.

Right before Christmas, Bean had hired eight staff members evenly split between D.C. and the district, but said most of her future hires will work in the district office to start handling constituent services.

Delivering for her constituents and increasing her name identification the next two years could go a long way toward ensuring Bean is no one-termer, says one leading Republican who once ran for the very seat Bean now holds.

"I would think she'll have a hard time maintaining that seat, but with members of the House, the re-election rate is extremely high because they have the frank (free mailing privilege)," said departing U.S. Sen. Peter Fitzgerald of Inverness. "I'm sure she'll start franking right away and get her name ID up to 100 percent and it will be hard for anybody to take her out. I expect also that she will vote conservatively against higher taxes and for tax relief and against excessive spending. And she won't be real easy to defeat."

Freshman: Bean sets sights on House committees