

Incumbent Chris Kelly tops Laura Nauser in 24th House District



Photo by Matt Cavanah

Chris Kelly shoots pool Tuesday night at Billiards on Broadway during his watch party. Kelly will return to the Missouri House after defeating challenger Laura Nauser.

By [Rudi Keller](#)

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State Rep. Chris Kelly will go to Jefferson City in January as part of the smallest group of minority party members in decades after posting a solid victory over Columbia City Councilwoman Laura Nauser, who could not overcome Kelly's 33 years in politics and huge fundraising advantage.

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Kelly won the second term of his legislative comeback with just less than 56 percent of the vote in the 24th House District, which covers southern Boone County, including portions of southwest Columbia.

Kelly, D-Columbia, will be one of only 58 Democrats in the Missouri House when the General Assembly convenes. Republicans, taking advantage of a year when voters are angry about a poor economy and a federal government awash in red ink, won 105 seats.

“We got blistered,” Kelly said of the Republican sweep statewide.

Not since the 1980s, when Kelly first won a legislative seat, has a majority party had such a huge advantage. At that time, it was a Democratic majority, and Kelly quickly rose to a prominent spot on the House Budget Committee, which he chaired before exiting the legislature in 1994.

Kelly attributed his solid win on a night when Republicans elsewhere were scoring big to his focus on the district and reaching across the aisle to the majority.

Voters in the district “like the bipartisanship, and they like the fact that I work hard both in the election and the legislature,” Kelly said. “They think that after 30 years I will put the interests of Boone County first.”

In defeat, Nauser, a Republican, said she was pleased with the way the race was conducted, without negative advertising and without nasty disagreements during candidate forums.

“I like Chris,” she said. “I may not agree with him all the time, but he is a good man.”

Taking on Kelly was a long shot, and she knew it when she filed, Nauser said. “I knew it was going to be a challenge, and that is how it is when you run against an incumbent. He has a long, distinguished career. I am relatively new.”

Nauser was elected to the Columbia City Council in 2005 and re-elected without opposition in 2008. She said earlier this week she would not seek another term on the council if she lost the legislative contest.

Kelly began his political career in 1977 when he was appointed Boone County clerk. He won his first legislative race in 1982. He returned to the legislature in 2008 when he defeated incumbent Republican Ed Robb.

Kelly said he was disappointed Nauser was not seeking another term on the council. “My opponent is a talented and honorable woman,” he said.

Asked how he could be effective in an overwhelmingly Republican House, Kelly said he would continue to seek out fellow lawmakers who want to help the University of Missouri and work on issues where he could make a difference.

“I’ll do the same thing I did last time,” he said. “I am always looking for 82 votes. After the election, I am a legislator, not a Democrat or a Republican.”

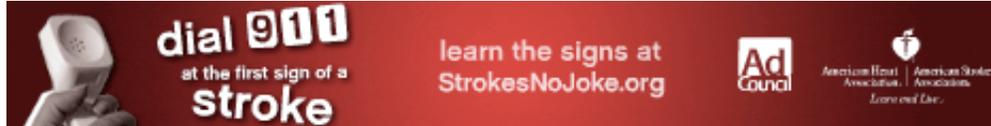
The state needs solutions, not politics, in hard times, he said. “There are too many people in the legislature who just want to see demons on the other side. I see people, some who have ideas I disagree with.”

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