

## 'Learning to Dance on the Edge of Authority': State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz on our central question

By State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz

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When I was first elected to the Illinois House in 1995, I found myself firmly planted in the good old boys club, with few female colleagues to turn to for advice, guidance, and inspiration. Public service and politics was still a field for men. That was 1995.

Today, women are running for office (and winning) at record highs. When I first took office, being a newly-elected woman was somewhat daunting, and finding my place in the General Assembly was a challenge. As I found my niche, I realized that it wasn't just my gender, but my political philosophy that set me apart from my peers. I represent a liberal Chicago district long known as a stronghold for progressive Democratic politics. Yet, it is a very diverse constituency with high-income residents juxtaposed with people who struggle from day-to-day and from paycheck-to-paycheck.

My constituents have long demanded the kind of policy and reform that is difficult to achieve in a representative democracy. I realized that if I expected the diverse assembly I served in to understand my district's unique issues, I would have to understand their issues as well. That is why I served on the House Agriculture Committee in my first term to quickly establish relationships and forge bonds with my colleagues from downstate and rural Illinois.

Like anything else in life—it's all about relationships. I can proudly say that many of my good Ag friends stepped out of their comfort zone and supported my initiatives, and I did the same for theirs.

Learning to build my power wheel and dance on the edge of authority are two things that I am very proud of. I also can tell you all you want to know about hog farms.

And—not only despite these tough economic conditions, but *because* of these tough economic conditions—I saw no better time to focus on the people who needed help from the legislature the most. From civil rights for our LGBT community to Medicaid reform for the vulnerable to housing for low-income families, I stood up regardless of potential political backlash. It wasn't always popular to rebel against the mainstream, but I have always felt in my heart it was right.

(As told to Clare Curley. For more information on Rep. Feigenholtz, visit [www.staterepsara.com](http://www.staterepsara.com))