

Freshman class

'Real change may come in increments. And it must be done carefully and thoroughly. That's why I'm limiting myself to only 10 to 12 bills this year.'

By Charlene Zettel

Editor's note: Twenty-nine bright-eyed and bushy-tailed newcomers, buoyant with enthusiasm and energy, join the march of the California Legislature this year. Before the old hands of the Capitol could set them straight (see Phil Isenberg's piece, page 30,) we invited two rookies to put pen to paper to chronicle the early expectations of a first-termer. What follows are the rose-colored outlooks of Charlene Zettel (R-Poway) and Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento).

Running for state Assembly is one of the most demanding and exciting endeavors imaginable — but winning the election was only the first step.

As I took the oath of office, I looked at the formidable task of serving as a minority member of the minority party that must help resolve longstanding and newly emerging issues in a state of unprecedented change, increasing diversity, increasing partisanship and competing needs.

As we enter the final year of this century, we face critical, complex challenges like water quality and distribution; improving education; fixing our roads, bridges and highways; local government financing; and addressing the growing problems of domestic and juvenile violence. Many of these issues have been ignored or even exacerbated by years or even decades of bickering or neglect.

At the same time, I must balance my own life: my family, my business and my role as a Republican, a Latina, as a woman.

As California's first elected Republican Latina, I have a responsibility to show others — and not just Latinas — that Republican principles can solve real problems. And I want to show that anyone can — and should — have an active role in deciding the future of California.

Beside me is a long list of other freshman members facing similar challenges.

Many, like me, have little experience "under the dome" — a result of term limits and the competitive districts created by an impartial reapportionment.



Illustrations by Sandra Hoover

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brims with great expectations

'Waking up on the morning after the election with the full realization that I now represent nearly a half million people gave me pause.'

By Darrell Steinberg

I was serving my first term as a member of the Sacramento City Council in 1995 when I thought I had a really promising public policy idea — Students Today Achieving Results for Tomorrow (START). The program would open 20 Sacramento schools from 2:30 to 6 p.m. daily and provide our children with a safe place for academic enrichment, arts and recreation.

I convinced myself that the program would be immediately endorsed by my colleagues and the public alike. What objections could there possibly be? In the answer to this simple question came one of the best lessons I learned in my council service: People see things in their own ways, and to expect otherwise stalls progress in public policy.

Some asked about START, "Where will the money come from in the midst of another city budget deficit?" Others wondered, "Shouldn't we spend the money on public safety?" And the most revealing question was: "Are you going to get all the credit for this idea?"

I quickly realized that each was a perfectly reasonable question. I could not expect others to share my enthusiasm when the idea was presented to them cold, stripping them of the benefit of living with it as I had done. So, I set out to answer each question, altering the START design in the process.

And the program is better for it. Three years later, START is a huge success that is being replicated statewide and around the nation. What it took to kick off this project has provided me with the lessons I take with me to the Capitol.

As I begin my first term in the California Assembly, I have a very different, more grounded perspective on the business of being an elected official. I remain confident that public service provides endless and attainable opportunities to help people. But I also realize that good ideas are only the very beginning of the process. Implementing good ideas requires strategic planning, teamwork, persistence, good personal relationships, compromise, and anticipating op-

