

Gordon prepared to lead

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SPRINGFIELD —

Newly minted state Rep. Jehan Gordon admitted to feeling "a lot of mixed emotions" Wednesday, when she took her oath of office and, soon afterward, voted to impeach Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

Gordon, a Peoria Democrat, was sworn in as the new representative from the 92nd District during the Illinois House of Representatives' inauguration ceremony at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

"I'm excited to have the opportunity to represent the people of my hometown, the place where I was born and raised," she said. "It's an awesome responsibility, but it's also very daunting."

Her first piece of business involved voting for House speaker, an election that takes place every two years when a new version of the General Assembly begins. All 70 House Democrats, including Gordon, voted for Democrat Michael Madigan of Chicago. The 48 Republicans voted for Republican Tom Cross of Chicago.

Gordon and other House members also voted 117-1 to impeach Blagojevich. It marked the second time in less than a week that the House had taken such a vote. The only "no" came from new state Rep. Deborah Mell, Blagojevich's sister-in-law.

The second vote was needed to ensure there'd be no questions about the legality of the earlier impeachment vote because of the switchover from one version of the General Assembly to another, Madigan said.

Gordon said that impeaching Blagojevich and removing him from office is "necessary in order to move the state forward."

The 27-year-old said she looks forward to the work ahead of her, though she recognizes there will be plenty of challenges.

"We have a governor who we have to oust. We have a budget that right now is carrying a \$4 billion structural deficit. If we don't change the way that we do business now, we are absolutely going to be in trouble," Gordon said.

"I'm ready to roll up my sleeves and do what I can to help put the state back on track."

Gordon's hometown backers believe she's up to the job.

"She's extremely sharp, has good common sense, was brought up in a good family," said Billy Halstead, chairman of the Peoria County Democratic Party. "She knows what's right and wrong, and she knows it takes hard work to get out there and make a community better."

Laraine Bryson, president of the Tri-County Urban League, said, "One of the good things is that as a young person, she'll bring fresh ideas, a new approach."

Halstead and Bryson were among 150 or so of Gordon's supporters who braved Wednesday's dicey weather to watch the inauguration ceremony in person.

"We're just proud of Jehan and what she's been able to accomplish," said Derrick Booth, who has been friends with Gordon for about four years.

Gordon's mother, Annie Jo, said she felt a combination of pride and concern about the job her daughter has just begun.

"They have almost insurmountable work to achieve here in Springfield, and it's going to call for the support and encouragement and hard work on the part of the citizens back at home, as well as the representatives who have come here to Springfield," she said.

But she added: "By and large, I'm a happy mama today."

Jehan Gordon takes over the legislative seat that most recently was held by Republican Joan Krupa of Peoria. Krupa finished up the term of former state Rep. Aaron Schock, a Republican who left his legislative seat early to join the U.S. Congress.

Gordon defeated Krupa in the November general election for the 92nd District. The district consists of roughly the southern two-thirds of the city of Peoria, including Downtown, and West Peoria, Peoria Heights, Kickapoo and portions of Bartonville and Limestone Township.

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