

# Indiana Rep. Kathy Kreag Richardson

25-year veteran of the legislature has unique dual role in government: state lawmaker and local elections administrator

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

Some colleagues have been known to call her “mother.” Rep. Kathy Kreag Richardson jokes that she sometimes thinks of herself as “cat herder.”

But her actual leadership title is majority caucus chair, and her ascension to the position in 2000 made Richardson something else — a trailblazer.

She was the first woman in her state’s history to be elected to a leadership post in the Indiana House. Seventeen years later, Richardson continues to hold the post and value her role in guiding legislative policy, building relations among lawmakers and staff, and helping her caucus’s newly elected members.

“You spend a lot of time making sure the new members, and all of the members, are successful, probably even more than you think about your own successes,” Richardson says.

Over the past nearly two decades, too, she has been part of a leadership team that has helped solidify Republican control of the Indiana General Assembly. Richardson entered the state House in 1993 when her party was in the minority; it now enjoys super-majority control of that same chamber.

“I’ve enjoyed being part of that team,” she says, “sitting in the room where we’re planning out our agenda for the year or working out a particular policy.”

Richardson’s decades-long connection to Indiana government dates back to her teenage years, when, at the age of 19, she took a job as deputy clerk in Hamilton County. That led to a successful run for the elected position of county clerk (she held the position for two terms).

Then, in 1991, when the local Indiana House representative decided to call it quits and wanted to find a successor, he thought of Richardson, a former student in his American government class.

That started Richardson’s 25 years (and counting) of legislative service; all the while, she has kept her day job in the clerk’s office, where she currently serves as elections administrator for her home county, located just north of Indianapolis.

Because of that outside work, Richardson soon became a leader inside the Capitol on elections-related issues — a familiar experience for others serving in Indiana’s part-time legislature.

“You get a niche and they never let you out,” Richardson jokes. “Our insurance folks in the legislature help with insurance issues, our bankers with banking issues, and so on. For me, that’s been elections and county government.”

She has been a part of legislative measures that created online voter registration in Indiana, required the centralized counting of absentee ballots, and established countywide vote centers. She also has served a leading role in the state’s redistricting process.

In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, Richardson reflected on her career in Indiana government, her legislative accomplishments, and her outreach efforts for constituents. Here are excerpts.

## Bio-sketch of Rep. Richardson

- ✓ Member of Indiana House since 1992
- ✓ Majority caucus chair since 2000; first woman elected to leadership post in Indiana House
- ✓ Vice chair of Elections and Apportionment Committee
- ✓ Elections administrator for Hamilton County, Ind.; has worked in county clerk’s office since 1976, including as two-time elected county clerk
- ✓ Member of CSG’s Midwestern Legislative Conference Executive Committee



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**Q: Because of your background, you have a unique perspective on elections. What are some of the areas you tend to think about in this area, both as a legislator and elections administrator?**

**A:** The thing about elections is that they are run by people. Yes, you have voting machines, but when you send all that equipment out, it’s still our poll workers running things and making sure the elections work.

We have to make it as easy on them as possible, and we have to find new ways of attracting younger poll workers. I think you’d hear that throughout the country. The poll workers that we have are getting older, and they want to turn it over to someone else.

**Q: What are some policy ideas to meet those challenges?**

**A:** We passed a law allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to work at the polls. They can’t be the [local elections] inspector, but they can be the judge or the clerk. One theory behind this law is you get young people excited about elections by showing them the inside of the process, not just what they hear from the media.

Another idea is vote centers. It’s centralized voting, so instead of having, say, 222 precincts with 222 locations, you have 20 voting locations in a county where anybody can go and vote. A lot of our smaller counties have begun using vote centers. Our four largest counties haven’t adopted them yet, but they are a tool that could help us in terms of reducing the cost of voting equipment and the number of election workers that we need.

**Q: Along with your work on public policy, you are involved quite a bit with helping newly elected representatives because of your position as**

**majority caucus chair. What do you try to impart to new members about the legislative process?**

**A:** I try to stress the importance of building relationships. That means working within your committee process and, when you have a bill, making sure you build support before it goes to committee. It’s also about working with members on the other side of the aisle. We now have some classes of legislators [in our caucus] who haven’t served in the minority. But I think it’s important to impress upon them that there is another side.

**Q: Over the years, what are some of the areas where you think Indiana and its legislature have stood out in terms of performance?**

**A:** Even when many other states aren’t functioning as well, we have been very successful on issues like keeping our bond ratings high, our budget balanced, and our taxes low. This past year, we did enact a gas tax increase, but it projects 20-year growth and improvements to our roads. As a Crossroads of America, as we’re sometimes called, we need to make sure our infrastructure is in good shape for our economy. So we bit the bullet and worked very hard on that for the last two years to get it passed.

**Q: Every year, you host a unique event for your constituents called “Adult Page Day”. Can you talk a little bit about what that is?**

**A:** We started that the first time I got elected because some people who had helped me win said they never had been a page. We did it for fun, but it worked out so well, I’ve now had 25 of those Adult Page Days. Constituents come down and spend a day at the Statehouse. We take them to a committee hearing, then we have lunch together and talk issues, and they sit in on a session on the House floor. It’s really a great opportunity. ★