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- » News
- » Sports
- » Lifestyles
- » Opinion
- » Classifieds
- » Police Reports
- » Obituaries
- » World News
- » Entertainment
- » MotorSports
- » Message Board
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- » Sound Off
- » Archives
- » E-mail Forms
- » Legal Center
- » Tennessee Public Notices
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» Best Of Ballot

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Girl power grows in Tennessee GOP

Butt sworn in as district's 1st female rep.

By SKYLER SWISHER/ sswisher@c-dh.net

Maury County made history Tuesday when its first female state representative took the oath of office in Nashville.

Republican Sheila Butt joined Speaker of the House Beth Harwell in breaking ground for women in the Volunteer State during the first day of the 107th General Assembly.

"It's a humbling experience," she said shortly after being sworn in as state representative for the 64th District. "I am grateful to my constituents for giving me the opportunity to come up here and serve them. It really is an exciting time here in Tennessee."

Harwell, a 53-year-old former political science professor from Nashville, became the first woman to be elected speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives.

Butt, a motivational speaker and political newcomer, beat out freshman Democratic state Rep. Ty Cobb in the November election, riding a nationwide GOP wave into office.

In addition to being Maury County's first female state representative, Butt is only the second Republican since Reconstruction to hold the seat. Former state Rep. Tom DuBois, who served from 2002 to 2008, was the first.

Butt said the Republican-led General Assembly will focus on creating a more "business-friendly" climate in Tennessee, combating illegal immigration and implementing tort reform.

She is working to sponsor a bill that would ban the sale of drug paraphernalia in convenience stores.



State Rep. Sheila Butt, R-Columbia, left, and Tennessee House Speaker Beth Harwell, R-Nashville, are pictured at the Tennessee State Capitol in Nashville Tuesday, the first day of the 107th General Assembly. Courtesy photo



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Despite the big day for women on Capitol Hill Tuesday, females still only comprise about a fifth of the General Assembly's 132 seats, according to the Center for American Women and Politics. In 2010, the group ranked Tennessee's legislature No. 40 in the nation in terms of the percentage of women serving.

Butt attributed the gap to a shortage of female candidates, but she said more women are deciding to run for office every year.

"Being a representative is much more about the heart of a person who wants to be a statesman than the gender," she said.

Also on Tuesday, state Sen. Bill Ketron, R-Murfreesboro, was sworn in for a third term in office. District 74 State Rep. John C. Tidwell, the only Democrat left representing Maury County residents, also took the oath of office for his eighth term.

Wally Beasley, chairman of the Maury County Republican Party, said he's glad a woman's perspective will be added to the county's delegation of representatives in state government.

"It shows the voters of Maury County are ready to accept a woman and realize a woman can do everything a man can do," he said.

Story created Jan 12, 2011 - 14:55:34 EST.

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raydeccom wrote on Jan 12, 2011 5:48 PM:

" Too bad she's a racist homophobe, AND I QUOTE, 'Homosexuals and homosexuality will be the downfall of the United States of America' -Sheila Butt

p.s. She looks like Skeletor from He-Man "

govskeptic wrote on Jan 12, 2011 6:48 PM:

" It's a good day for most of the people of Maury County that they now have a decent, qualified, individual representing a conservative view in Nashville. Maybe in 2012 the remaining citizens in the other district will make a new selection as well. Best Wishes, Representative Butt! "

colnewstip wrote on Jan 12, 2011 9:58 PM:

" Representative Butt is already serving the 64th district with honor and distinction. The people of Maury County elected someone that they can be very proud of to represent our values on Capital Hill. With Mrs Butt's bold leadership, Maury County will lead the State to make sweeping changes and Tennessee will lead our Nation in similiar changes. Thank you Mrs Butt for being there for your community. We certainly appreciate you for your service. "

roddma wrote on Jan 13, 2011 2:25 AM:

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January 2011

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

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