

Kathleen Vinehout: Dairy Farmer, College Professor, State Senator

Kathleen Vinehout, 53, came to politics relatively late in her career after spending 10 years running the family dairy farm and the 10 years before that teaching health administration to college students.

In her first run for public office, Kathleen was elected in 2006 to the state senate from Wisconsin's 31st Senate District, a large mostly rural district in the western part of the state. She was re-elected in 2010 and is serving her second four-year term.

In the senate, she has worked to make health care affordable, create health insurance exchanges for individuals, farmers and small businesses, bring more equity to school funding, keep consumer protection provisions in our telecommunication laws, and improve the efficiency of state government operations.

She is the ranking member of the Joint Committee on Audit and Vice-chair of the Senate Democratic Caucus. She is a member of the Senate's Committee on Education, the Senate's Committee on Financial Institutions and Rural Affairs, and the Special Committee on State Tribal Relations. She served for four years as the Chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education.

Prior to being elected to the Senate, Kathleen was the primary operator of the family's 50 cow dairy farm near Alma in Buffalo County. The farm had a rolling herd average of 21,000 pounds of milk, sold breeding stock nationally and internationally and received many quality milk awards. She was elected president of the Dairy Herd Improvement Association in Buffalo County and represented the district at statewide dairy meetings. For two years, Kathleen assisted the Wisconsin Farmers Union in agriculture and dairy policy and worked part time in 2005 as an advocate at the state capitol for the Farmers Union. Kathleen and her family live on the family farm. The farm is now certified organic and produces hay and grain.

Before she and her husband, Douglas, started their dairy farm, Kathleen directed both graduate and undergraduate programs in health administration at the University of Illinois at Springfield. For ten years she was a member of the faculty and taught in the Health Services Administration and Women's Studies Programs. Kathleen taught courses in leadership, management, program evaluation and health policy and politics. Her academic work focused on state health policy, health care organization, the history of health care reform and health problems facing rural communities. Kathleen also worked with the American Hospital Association teaching seminars in health care management.

Kathleen earned a Masters of Public Health and PhD in Health Services Research from St. Louis University. She holds an Associate Degree in agriculture and graduated with honors from Southern Illinois University with a Bachelors of Science in education.

Kathleen has experienced health care from all sides. Her first job was as a nursing assistant. She has worked in staff and management roles in a variety of settings including

a university medical center, primary care, acute care, home care and long term care. She held positions in medical records, medical education, health services research and quality assurance. She was the education director for a large urban home health agency and through her work learned first-hand the connection between poverty and health. As a farmer she and her family spent nearly two years without health insurance.

Kathleen is active in her community. She currently serves on the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission and the Mississippi River Parkway Commission. She is a member of the Eau Claire, Tomah, Sparta and Alma Chambers of Commerce. She served on the pastoral council of St. Lawrence Catholic Church, taught a weekly bible study class for eight years and still is a member of the church choir.

Kathleen served for seven years as chair of the Democratic Party of Buffalo County and was honored in 2005 with the state-wide Eleanor Roosevelt Award for her work in grassroots organizing. She served on the Buffalo County Agricultural Fair Association Board, the Buffalo County Farm Bureau Board. She was also a member of the Wisconsin Holstein Association and she and her family have shown cattle at district shows.

Kathleen is the eldest of five children. Both her parents served in the US Air Force. Her father was a member of the Laborer's Union, her mother a registered nurse.