

New members . . .

Rooted in education, Folliard focuses on kids

Rep. Betty Folliard (DFL-Hopkins) spent part of her childhood kicking around the campus of a prestigious university, and her experiences there helped to shape her political perspective.



Rep. Betty Folliard

"I come from an education family," Folliard said. "Both of my parents were teachers, and my father went on to become dean of education at Stanford University. So education was the subject around our dinner table at home."

Folliard arrived at the Capitol determined to focus on education, and her appointments to the House Education Committee and its Higher Education Finance Division provide a springboard for her legislative agenda.

"I came here number one to work on education. That is the principal impetus for me being here," Folliard said. "I believe that education is essential for the maintenance of our democratic society. I grew up with that value, and the fact that I have three kids in school right now really brings that value home."

Folliard spent much of her childhood in the San Francisco bay area and went on to attend Stanford, where she received a bachelor's degree in drama. She later earned a master's degree in theater at Wayne State University in Michigan.

"I look at my theater background as excellent communications training for life," Folliard said. "You have to be able to handle rejection and that's not bad in the political sphere, too."

She pursued a career in theater in Michi-

gan, Minnesota, and New York before moving to Dublin, where her three children were born and the elder two began their schooling.

In Ireland, Folliard was exposed to an education system different from Minnesota's in many ways.

Schools there struggled to get by on "extremely scarce" resources, but students received rigorous instruction on core academic subjects. Irish students also spend more time in the classroom, with an academic year some 40 days longer, and each school day is longer, too.

With that experience in mind, Folliard now questions some of the assumptions of the status quo in American public education. She supports efforts to offer new scheduling options in public schools, such as year-round programs and extended school day models.

"We have to explode our paradigm on the issue of time in school," Folliard said. "One way I think the Legislature can do that is through providing more incentives to allow new choices in school districts."

After more than seven years, Folliard and her family left Ireland in 1987, and, she said, came to the Twin Cities for simple reasons.

"I've lived a lot of places, but we determined to settle back in Minnesota because it was the best place to raise a family," Folliard said. "What drew us here was having some of my own family here and having a family-friendly place to raise the kids."

Folliard has lived in Hopkins for the past decade. During that time, she has been active in the community, serving as a member of the city's strategic planning committee and was vice chair of the local PTA. She served on the Hopkins School Board for the past five

years and was its vice chair for two years. She works as a market researcher for Vaughn Communications in Minneapolis.

When current state Sen. Steve Kelley (DFL-Hopkins) decided to leave the House and seek a seat in the upper chamber in 1996, Folliard was encouraged by friends and associates to seek the open House seat.

"I came to the conclusion that I had something to offer, a lot of energy to put forth, and deep caring for our community and our quality of life here," she said. "I decided I could do it, that I could win it, and that I was the best person for the job."

As Folliard settles into her new position, she is immersing herself in the work of her education committees and others, including the Environment and Natural Resources Committee and the General Legislation, Veterans Affairs and Elections Committee.

"I come here with my naiveté intact," she said. "I'm an optimist. I believe that if people of goodwill come together for the common good, you're going to come out with decisions that are best for your society."

—Nick Healy

District 44A

1996 population: 32,777

Largest city: Hopkins

County: Hennepin

Location: western metropolitan area

Top concern: "My primary goal in education is that we provide a quality education for all kids. We must shore up the cracks and address the biggest barrier to education, which is poverty. We also must consider it on a systemic level, looking at the problems of housing, jobs, transportation, and education as part of a whole."

—Rep Betty Folliard

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