

Nancy Brataas, state Senate pioneer, dies

● The Rochester Republican was considered the first woman "elected in her own right," in 1975.

By JOY POWELL
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Former state Sen. Nancy Brataas died Thursday, leaving legislators past and present speaking of a woman they say helped shape Minnesota history.

The Rochester Republican served 17 years and was the second woman elected to the Senate. The first woman,

Laura Emelia Johnson Naplin, served from 1927 to 1934 but was elected to fill her husband's seat after his death, prompting Brataas' former colleague, Sen. Carla Nelson, to call her the first woman "elected in her



Brataas

own right."

Brataas, once a smoker, had long battled emphysema and COPD and was in hospice care. She was 86.

"Certainly, her legacy is one that will live on forever," Nelson said. "She was a leader of leaders. She changed forever the Minnesota State Capitol."

Brataas also was the chair of the Minnesota Republican Party from 1963 to 1969.

Known as a great orator and workhorse, Brataas laid the groundwork for getting a University of Minnesota

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◀ BRATAAS FROM B1

campus in Rochester. Nelson said the late senator pointed to the need in the late '80s and early '90s for the need for a four-year university there.

"It was her vision. It was her passion, and she worked tirelessly to get a full University of Minnesota campus in Rochester," Nelson said.

Brataas advocated for an institution that would be wired

for today's education and tomorrow's jobs, Nelson said. The majority of its resources are online.

"It's the university of today and tomorrow. It's not the university of yesterday. It's laser-focused on health sciences. It has a strong connection with the jobs and internships with Mayo Clinic and other health entities, and its not your traditional liberal arts college."

Nelson is among those who

saw Brataas as a mentor. For her, Brataas represented how women could lead the state.

When Brataas was elected in 1975, there was not even a restroom for female senators.

"Some of the male senators at first didn't know if they would let her speak, because she didn't wear a tie," Nelson said. "So she always wore a scarf."

Brataas put up with a lot, Nelson said, and knew that she

had to be better prepared and know more than anyone there.

"She proved herself. She went way beyond. She became one of the most beloved senators in Minnesota's history."

A resolution that Nelson prepared in Brataas' honor two years ago notes that she also served as a political campaign consultant, as a board member for Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, among other civic roles.

"She was such an influential senator," even when her party was in the minority, Nel-

son said. She recalled advice Brataas gave her, which was to not always say no.

"Sometimes you can be helpful to the majority and there are going to be times when you are going to need to ask them for their help," Nelson quoted Brataas as saying.

"It was always wonderful to know I could talk to her about issues going on in the Legislature and in Rochester-Olmsted County. We all will miss her deeply."

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Clarification for April 24, 2014

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A story on Page B1 Friday said that Nancy Brataas was chairwoman of the Minnesota Republican Party from 1963 to 1969. She served along with a party chairman.

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