

NEWS OBITUARIES STAR TRIBUNE SEP 16 '07

Mary Forsythe, a pioneer in state House

● The political mover and shaker was the first woman to lead the Appropriations Committee.

By BEN COHEN • bcohen@startribune.com

Mary Forsythe, a former member of the Minnesota House of Representatives who was the first woman to lead the powerful House Appropriations Committee, died in St. Paul on Sept. 6.

Forsythe, a Republican who represented Edina for 18 years and led the Appropriations Committee from 1985 to 1986, was 87.

When she was elected to the House in 1973, only 17 women had served in the Minnesota Legislature between 1858, when statehood was granted, and 1972.

Forsythe, who had been a homemaker, had plenty of political experience. She made numerous appearances for her husband, Robert, during his unsuccessful campaigns for the U.S. Senate in 1966 and attorney general in 1970.

When she was elected, she was appointed to the Appropriations Committee.

Rep. Ron Erhardt, who now represents Edina, was her campaign manager and recalled her "sense of community."

"She was a wonderful person, and a terrific mentor for me and others," said Erhardt. "The legislative leadership had a lot



KENT KOBERSTEEN • Star Tribune file

Mary Forsythe, former Minnesota House Appropriations Committee chairwoman, at work in 1973.

of confidence in Mary."

Forsythe worked to direct money to the suburbs, believing that urban areas needed to share more of the tax dollars.

The native of Whitehall, Wis., graduated with a bachelor's degree in music from St. Olaf College, and taught elementary and high school music in the early 1940s. A soprano, she sang in the St. Olaf Choir, and in church choirs thereafter.

Her trained voice helped her assert herself in committee meetings and on the House floor, an advantage many wom-

en did not enjoy, said Sid Pauly, a former House member from Eden Prairie.

"Mary had a voice of authority. When she spoke, people listened," said Pauly. "She was bright and was very straightforward. People trusted her."

Before the 1985 session opened, she told the Star Tribune that "government should only do what people can't do for themselves," and that "government is best closest to home."

Forsythe was instrumental in improving women's prison facilities and programs. The Education Center at the Shakopee prison is named in recognition of her work on prisoners' behalf. She also was the chief House sponsor of the mandatory seat belt law.

She retired in 1990, and moved soon after to Longville, Minn. Her husband died in June.

She is survived by her son, Robert, of Kansas City, Mo.; daughters Jean Peterson of Roseville, Polly Johnson of Bloomington, Ann Smith of Sioux Falls, S.D., and Joan Lewis of New Hope; a sister, Irene Lamprecht of Sun City West, Ariz.; 12 grandchildren, and one great-grandson.

Services will be held at 2 p.m. Monday at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 4100 Lyndale Av. S., Minneapolis. Visitation will be at 1 p.m. at the church.