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Rep. Mary Forsythe in 1974.

Forsythe Farewell



For the past 18 years, the names Forsythe and Edina have been synonymous.

When Mary Forsythe ends her political career on the last day of the 1990 legislative session, it will be hard for her to forget the 18 years she has served in the House.

A gold charm bracelet she keeps tucked away will serve as a constant reminder of several firsts that will be attached to her name.

One charm is emblazoned with the date she was sworn in as a representative — Jan. 2, 1973 — which also marked the first time that more than four women were elected to the House at one time.

Another charm marks the date she was elected, the first time a woman had ever

been elected representative from her Edina district. Other charms mark the day on which she was endorsed, and District 42B which she represents.

There's no charm commemorating her role as the first woman to serve as chair of the full Appropriations Committee. But that, perhaps, is one she could consider adding during her retirement.

"It's time to move on," says Forsythe, who at 69 is one of the grande dames of the Independent-Republican Party.

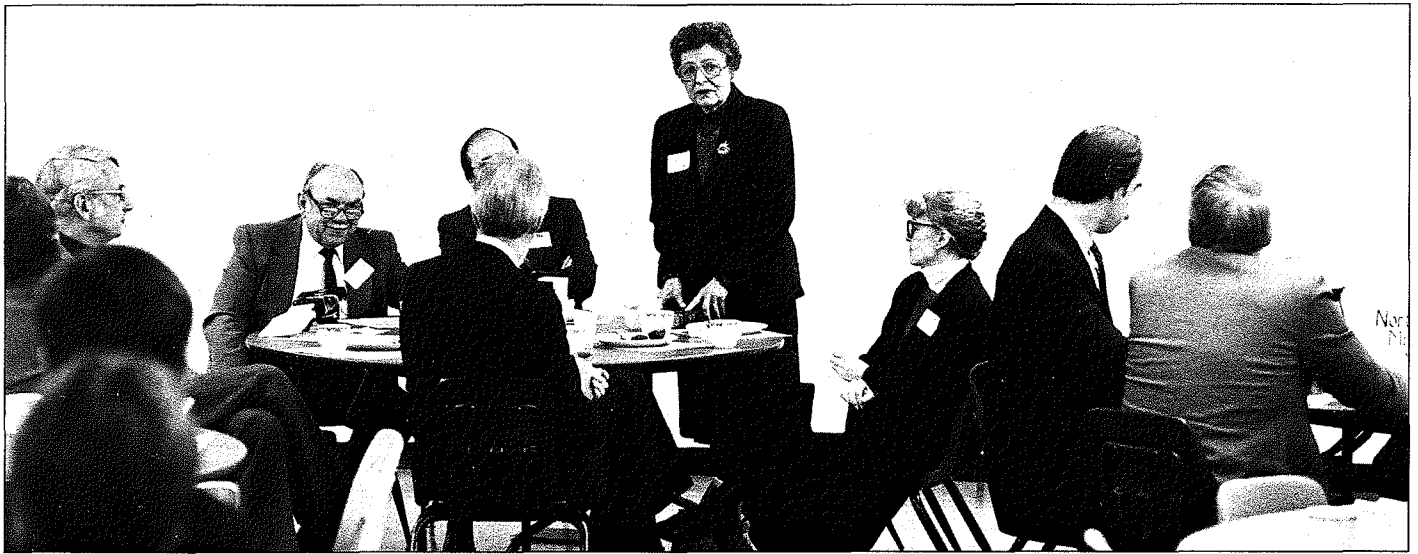
In a few weeks, Forsythe will clear out her second floor office in the State Office Building and pack away many other memories of the Legislature.

During the earlier days in the House, Forsythe says women were referred to as "gentlemen" in committee by some lobbyists and people testifying.

"People were not used to having women in the Legislature and they sometimes would forget we were there," she says.

Nor were people used to the idea of female candidates. It was hard to get women to run for office, she says, although she and many others spent a lot of time door-knocking for candidates, and serving as party officers and delegates.

"I think women were hesitant to get into something they considered to be a



Rep. Mary Forsythe frequently speaks at events such as this Lutheran bishop's breakfast.

man's job and something that was (considered) dirty," she says, adding that Minnesota politics is anything but that.

Although she has served in the House for 18 years, only in two of those years — 1985 and 1986 — were the Independent-Republicans in the majority.

She singled out two bills of note during

her career. She sponsored the mandatory seat belt law, which she called the toughest, most time-consuming bill she ever authored. But, she added, it's also one of the laws of which she's most proud because of its far-reaching effects and the lives it has, and will continue, to save.

She's also proud of a measure she sponsored that provided funding for people who adopt hard-to-adopt children — those with mental illnesses or physical disabilities, for example. Because of that legislation, many of those children have received good homes, she says.

Forsythe grew up in Whitehall, Wis., and attended high school there. She

obtained a Bachelor of Music degree from St. Olaf College in Northfield in 1942, and later taught music in elementary and high schools while her husband served in World War II.

Forsythe says she has drifted considerably from her childhood dream of becoming a missionary in Africa like her Aunt Mary, for whom she is named.

But in addition to spending time with her grandchildren (she is the mother of five), and reading historical novels and biographies, Forsythe says she hopes to pursue part of that dream: teaching.

Forsythe says she intends to become a volunteer in the state's literacy program.

"I'd love to teach someone how to read."



Reps. Forsythe and Dennis Poppenhagen (IR-Detroit Lakes) confer during a House floor session.



While preparing a birthday dinner for daughter Joan and granddaughter Ann, Rep. Forsythe casts a wary glance at grandson Matthew.