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Some women's place may be in House (or Senate)

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"A woman's place is in the House," said Bella Abzug, prophetically, as she rolled out of New York and into Congress last election.

Indications here in Minnesota are that an unprecedented number of women will find themselves in the House or Senate when the next session of the Minnesota Legislature begins.

There will be 31 women running for the Legislature Nov. 7. There are indications that a half-dozen, at least, will defeat their male opponents.

Fifteen of the women running say they would caucus with the Conservatives; the DFLers count 13. Three others say they are independents.

While most of the women candidates are from the metropolitan area, women also are running in such out-state communities as Moorhead, St. Peter, Winona, Washish and Silver Bay.

In the last session, only one legislator was a woman, Helen McMillan from District 31B, who has been a representative from Austin for 10 years. She's among those running this time, as is one black woman, Eloise Adams, St. Paul, a candidate in House District 65A.

One reason for the large number of women on the ballot is the work done by the new Minnesota Women's Political Caucus.

Rep. McMillan says: "The caucus has done tremendously well in ferreting out women who are competent to run, staying with them and giving them courage, and then generally cheering them on. It's the first time in history I've felt women have backed women."

Most of those interviewed will not admit to a feeling that this is a particularly propitious time for women to become politicians merely because of their sex. Rather, it is reapportionment and the chances redistricting the entire state gave to newcomers of all sorts which they say improve election chances for women.

"There's definitely not a large groundswell of support from people who are willing to vote for a woman just because she's a woman," said Phyllis Kahn. She is one of the founders of the women's political caucus and is given a good chance of representing District 57A, which

includes much of the University of Minnesota area of Minneapolis.

But Mrs. Kahn, who has two children, a Ph.D. in biophysics and a research job at the University of Minnesota, believes her sex has been an asset in her race.

Being a woman candidate has its problems. "One is getting people to believe I am the candidate," says Ms. Kahn. "They'll ask me who I'm working for. I've even had people say, 'Yes, we've gotten all his literature.'"

Going door to door, Virginia Wahlberg, a House candidate from District 46B in Fridley and a Republican Party official, finds that frequently she will end up talking with the woman of the house. "Sometimes if the man sees me, he'll ask his wife to go to the door. And kids will always call their mothers, not their fathers."

Most women asked about their campaigns said that occasionally they encounter a person—almost always it is a woman—who tells them they should be at home watching over their children rather than out ringing doorbells.

To those people, Barbara Sheets, Conservative in House District 60A of South Minneapolis and a teacher,

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WOMEN: 31 are running for

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state House, Senate positions

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retorts: "It's the quality of time spent with children, not the quantity."

Some candidates report receiving assurances from women — often older ones — that they are happy indeed to see a woman running for the Legislature and that it's about time.

"A few of the older gals have said they'd do anything they could to see that I'm elected," remarked Shirley Hunt, an independent opposing veteran legislator Otto Bang for the Senate in District 39 in parts of Edina and western Bloomington.

Mrs. Hunt, the mother of two boys, believes that women deserve "a full partnership" in the legislative process. "One reason maybe we have as many problems as we do is because we have an upper middle-class white male legislature," she said.

It is rare, however, to find a woman who will declare that she would represent women in particular if elected. Most mention that they would seek passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, an act which would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex.

Few of the candidates in Minnesota admit to embracing women's lib per se.

"I'm not at all a women's libber, I don't even look like one," said Lillian Mitchell, a District 47B candidate and a Blaine Conservative.



Kahn Hunt Sheets McMillan

She says she wants a voice in state government to question the current moral climate.

"I suppose that is more of a woman's issue," Ms. Mitchell said. "My pitch is that I don't feel we should change laws to make things easy for our young people to experiment in areas they are neither emotionally nor mentally prepared to handle."

A White Bear Lake housewife who is running for



Mitchell Braun Roth Wahlberg

the Senate in District 49, Beverly Braun, contends, "The meaningful statements on women's liberation will be made by performance, not protest. We women just need the opportunity to perform."

Marlene Roth, a House candidate in District 53B and long active in the League of Women Voters, does see herself as "a woman's candidate," though. "It's a reality of society that women have been a discriminated-against majority," she says. However, she hastens to add that

she would focus on issues for "all the people."

Would a female's touch change the Legislature's attitude? Its output? Kati Sasseville, a Conservative seeking election to the House from District 38B in Bloomington, thinks it might.

"When I talk about my concern about openness and integrity in government, women seem to understand I'm talking about something basic in the system. Men tend to seem more cynical and to feel no matter which party is in power you will never be able to let people know what's going on."



Sasseville

Mrs. Sasseville, 38 and mother of six, is a third-year law student at the University of Minnesota.

Marjorie Loeffler, the DFL-endorsed candidate for Senator from District 40 in Minnetonka, summed up the prevalent attitude among women on this fall's ballot: "I don't want to be elected just because I'm a woman, nor do I want to be defeated just because of that."