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Judge Fred Norton is retiring after 40 years of public service – most memorably in the House and most recently on the Appeals Court.

No branch of government was left unserved

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By Robert Whereatt
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Minnesota Court of Appeals Judge Fred Norton doesn't hit the mandatory retirement age of 70 until August.

But after 10 years on the court, Norton will retire Wednesday, eight months early.

"I just got it in my mind it was time to go," he said in a recent



Star Tribune Photo by Joey McLeister

Did Fred Norton prefer one branch over the other? "They've both been good at the time," he said with perfect judicial impartiality.

interview. "It just seemed that [age] 69½ was close enough for government work."

Actually, Norton's government work includes more than his 10 years on the court. He served in the Minnesota House for 20 years

and in the attorney general's office for 10 years before that, a trifecta of service in the judicial, legislative and executive branches of state government.

Turn to JUDGE on B2

JUDGE from B1

Norton may be best known for his tenures as House speaker

Norton was appointed to the court by DFL Gov. Rudy Perpich in 1987, five years after voters authorized the creation of an intermediate court between district courts and the Supreme Court.

His time on the court has, in large part, been out of public view, a string of calm years, in contrast to his stormy and very visible years in the Legislature.

The contrast in roles, he said, goes further.

After years of representing people as a legislator, of advocating positions on issues, of running on promises to perform, Norton entered an arena of independence, where impartiality is part of the job description.

Did he prefer one branch, one lifestyle over the other? "They've both been good at the time," he said with perfect judicial impartiality.

House service

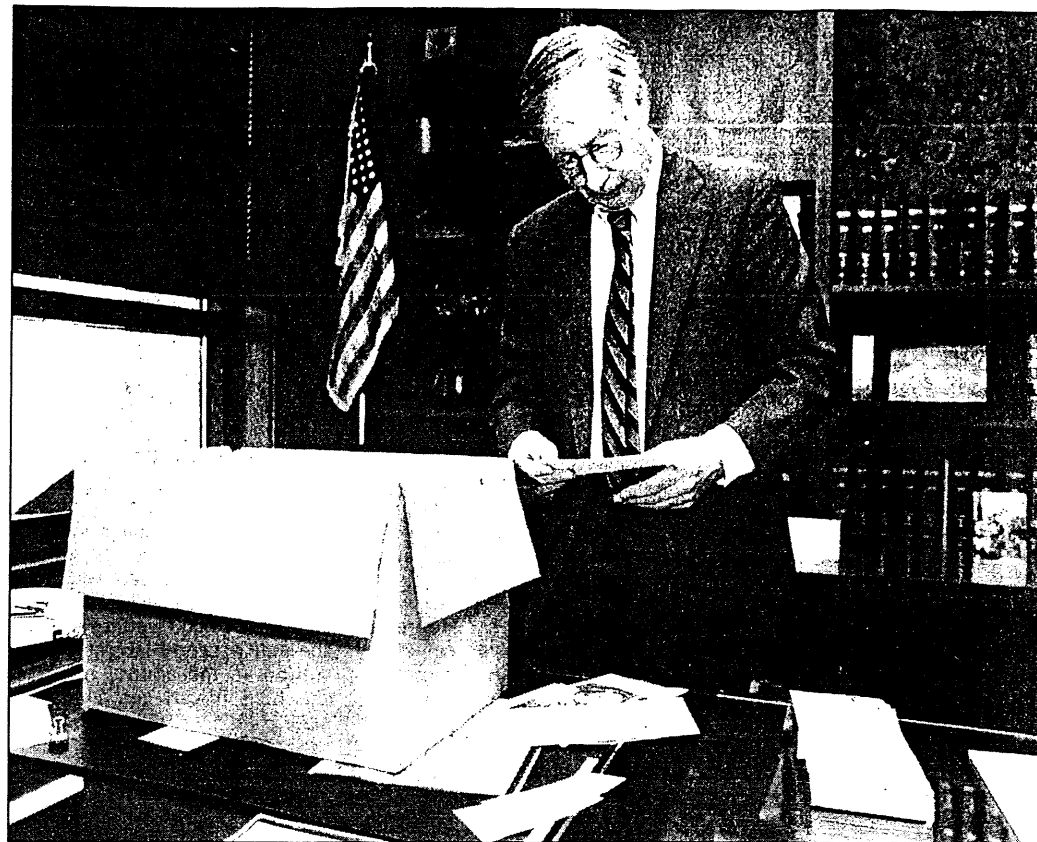
Still, Norton will best be remembered for his time in the House. He is the only speaker in state history to be elected to non-consecutive terms, first in 1980 and again in 1987.

He was elected to the House in 1966 and participated in the heady years of the 1970s when DFLers took control of the House, the Senate and the governor's office and passed a pent-up agenda that touched most Minnesotans in some way. •

Environmental legislation — passed. Labor legislation — passed. Election legislation that helped DFL candidates — passed. Increases in education spending — passed. Consumer protection legislation — passed.

The importance and influence of state government escalated during those years, and Norton was among its guiding forces. From 1973 to 1980, he was chairman of the Appropriation Committee, which provided the money for the new and expanding programs.

"Those were great years. Wendy and I still reminisce how great those early to mid-'70s years were," he said, referring to his friend, former Gov. Wendell An-



Star Tribune Photo by Joey McLeister

Judge Fred Norton is packing up his decades-long career in public service, the latest job serving on the Minnesota Court of Appeals. He will retire Wednesday, eight months shy of the mandatory retirement age of 70. "I just got it in my mind it was time to go," he said. "It just seemed that [age] 69½ was close enough for government work."

deron, who helped lead the DFL charge when he became governor in 1971.

In 1980, DFLers gained a one-vote majority in the House, after a contentious year in which Republicans and DFLers were tied, 67-67, and shared power.

Norton was elected speaker, beating out Rep. Irv Anderson, DFL-International Falls, with the help of the Republicans. Republicans feared Anderson, who had a reputation for fierce partisanship, and voted for Norton. In fact, Norton got only 24 of the 68 DFL votes.

"I do remember there being discussions about the power and vindictiveness of Irv Anderson," recalled the current House minority leader, Rep. Steve Sviggum, then a freshman Republican from Kenyon.

Norton's tenure as speaker was short. A year later, DFLers chose Rep. Harry Sieben of Hastings, who beat Norton by two votes.

Republicans held brief sway in the House in 1985 and 1986. As the minority leader, Norton led his caucus back into control in

1986. He was rewarded with the speaker's job in 1987.

Mr. Speaker

As a legislator, Norton was soft-spoken, mannered and patrician in his bearing, according to those who served with him.

"He was very calm and inclusive. We had a lot of new members when he was speaker in 1987," said the current speaker, Rep. Phil Carruthers, DFL-Brooklyn Center, who was then entering his first term. "He really involved us. He reached out to a diverse caucus. He was a model for me and continues to be a model for me."

But he wasn't Mr. Nice Guy to a fault. In 1987 he got the attention of his caucus when he removed from the Tax Committee two DFL members who voted against the DFL-sponsored tax bill, which included a major tax hike.

Rep. Tom Osthoff, of St. Paul, and Rep. Linda Scheid, now a senator from Brooklyn Park, and other DFL Tax Committee members were instructed by the speaker to vote for the bill.

Osthoff and Scheid defied him

and were yanked from the coveted committee. It wasn't a tough call, Norton said.

"I felt very strongly that they had voted against the interests of the caucus."

That year, the Appeals Court expanded by one judge. Perpich appointed Norton.

Gov. Arne Carlson will appoint a replacement for Norton; it will be his fifth appointment to the court. A spokesperson for the governor said Norton's replacement will be announced in January or February.

Norton hopes it will be a woman. Currently three of the 16 seats are held by women. "We ought to have six or seven here," he said.

Norton and his wife, Marvel, plan to travel to Sicily next year, continuing an odyssey that has taken them to four continents so far.

And though he's retiring, he still may be seen on the bench. Norton has been asked by Chief Judge Edward Toussaint Jr. to return in April and sit for three or four months as a retired judge, supplementing the court's manpower as its caseload grows.