

New members . . .

Education, environment top concerns for Tingelstad

First-termer Rep. Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover) is no stranger to elective politics. While in high school in the 1970s, Tingelstad



Rep. Kathy Tingelstad served as an intern for former state Sen. Robert Stassen (R-South St. Paul) who, she said, encouraged her to run for office someday. For years, Tingelstad avoided the senator's advice, opting instead to become involved in a less conspicuous manner. Indeed, over the years, she's worked in different capacities for a variety of candidates, ultimately managing successful campaigns for former state Rep. Teresa Lynch (R-Andover). In addition, she worked as a legislative assistant in Washington, D.C., on Al Quie's staff prior to his becoming governor of Minnesota

"The other day I tried to figure out exactly how many envelopes I've stuffed for various campaigns through the years," she said, laughing, "and I couldn't do it. The closest I could come was that it was over 100,000."

Finally, this mother of two took Stassen's advice and launched a bid for an open seat on the Anoka County Board in 1993. In a field of 10 candidates, Tingelstad finished third — trailing by just two votes — in a race that saw the top two finishers go on to a run-off contest. The loss was a disappointment, Tingelstad said, but she vowed to try again when the time was right.

An opportunity presented itself when Lynch announced that she would not run for office in 1996. Tingelstad, with her family's approval and Lynch's encouragement, de-

ecided that she would run for state representative. At 38, Tingelstad is the youngest woman in the Republican Caucus and the second-youngest woman in the House.

The decision to campaign for office was by no means an easy one, Tingelstad said, because it meant selling her business, a successful marketing and communications firm she founded in 1985. In fact, the Small Business Administration recently awarded her as the Women in Business Advocate of the Year for 1996. But running for office was something she wanted to do.

"I always wanted to be a legislator," Tingelstad said, sitting in her second floor office in the State Office Building — the same one Lynch occupied during her eight-year tenure as a representative. "I want to make a difference. I have two young children and I'd like to make Minnesota a better place for them."

Perhaps the best way to accomplish that, Tingelstad said, is through adequately and equitably funded education, an issue she places high on her legislative agenda.

One of the primary mechanisms for funding education, she explained, is through property tax. In her heavily residential district, the tax base isn't as large as some of those that contain more businesses. Consequently, the funding allocated per pupil isn't as much as it is in other metro school districts.

"We need a more equitable formula," she said, adding that many voters in her district, with its growing population, share that sentiment. In fact, Tingelstad's district has one of the highest populations of young families in the state.

Environmental issues also are a priority for

Tingelstad. As a member of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee, Tingelstad hopes to continue work toward balancing the rights of landowners — whose property contains wetlands — with the need to preserve the environment.

Tingelstad also serves on the Health and Human Services Committee. "With welfare reform, there will be a lot of action on this committee this session," she said. She's up for it, she explained. "I was a volunteer lobbyist here in the 1980s — working on adoption issues. She also has authored four medical books.

Tingelstad, who holds an undergraduate degree in communications from the University of Minnesota and an MBA certificate from the University of St. Thomas, said she counts Stassen, Lynch, and Quie as perhaps her greatest political influences. Moreover, the insight gleaned from her years with Lynch means she's a step or two ahead of the average first-term legislator. In time, she continued, she'd like to work her way up to a leadership position.

— F.J. Gallagher

District 50B

1995 population: 37,063

Largest city: Andover

County: Anoka

Location: northern metro area

Top concern: "Education funding is a big issue in my district . . . we need more equitable funding. Property tax reform will help."

— Rep. Kathy Tingelstad