

Emily Anne Staples Tuttle Pioneer in Minnesota politics

Political savvy, perseverance, warmth added up to leadership

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U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar's first political campaign experience came at age 14, door-knocking for Emily Anne Staples Tuttle, whose 1974 bid for the Minnesota House failed but left an indelible impression on her young volunteer.

"She was just so smart, and she was in charge and she was energetic," Klobuchar said.

Staples Tuttle went on to win a seat in the Minnesota Senate in 1976, becoming the first DFL woman to do so. She continued to break barriers for women, helping to found the Minnesota Women's Campaign Fund and the Minnesota Women's Political Caucus.

"I stand on her shoulders," Klobuchar said.

Staples Tuttle died Jan. 13 of a heart attack. She was 88.

"It never occurred to me that I couldn't do the things I wanted to do because I was a woman," said daughter Missy Staples Thompson. "And that was because Mom was such a trailblazer."

Staples Tuttle was born in Minneapolis to a homemaker mother who taught English to immigrants and a father who wrote for the Minneapolis Journal. She followed her father around on assignments, witnessing the labor unrest of the 1930s firsthand. At home, she was surrounded by her parents' love for the arts, which later led to her involvement with the Walker Art Center and Guthrie Theater.

She earned her B.A. from the University of Minnesota in 1950 and her M.P.A. from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

She worked in public relations in New York City and Paris, returning to Minnesota in 1954. She married Loring M. Staples Jr. and raised four children in Plymouth.

She lived unapologetically by her convictions, and in the early 1970s ditched the Republican Party in favor of

the DFL when the former backed away from supporting the Equal Rights Amendment.

Her husband, who had served as mayor of Plymouth, remained a Republican. "My dad really supported her," Staples Thompson said. "I think it was difficult sometimes."

Nevertheless, she persisted, bridging political and gender divides without complaint.

"Anytime Emily Anne knocked on any legislator's door, whether it was in St. Paul or Washington, D.C., people always welcomed her," said Carol Engebretson Byrne, president of the local nonprofit Global Minnesota.

Her Senate term ended in 1981, and in 1990, she ran unsuccessfully for the DFL nomination for lieutenant governor with Mike Hatch. She served as a Hennepin County commissioner from 1993 to 1995.

Along the way, Staples Tuttle mentored women who would come to count her as both a role model and a friend.

Engebretson Byrne was fresh off a year as a stay-at-home mom when she was chosen as president of Global Minnesota in 1996. Staples Tuttle, who chaired the selection committee, eased her transition and fears.

"I remember she would say to me, 'I will make sure that you will succeed,'" Engebretson Byrne said.

Among Staples Tuttle's accomplishments was a family planning program for low-income individuals that last year provided 90,000 people with birth control information, counseled 40,000 people and provided 31,000 people with access to family planning services. She also authored and championed the legislation that established the Family Planning Special Projects Program in 1978.

She was preceded in death by a son, Thomas Staples, and by her first and second husband, Gedney Tuttle. She is survived by daughters Thompson of St. Paul and Kathryn Staples of Copake Falls, N.Y.; son Gregory Staples of Norwalk, Conn.; stepsons Andrew, Carl, Jeff and John Tuttle, and 16 grandchildren and stepgrandchildren.

A memorial service and reception is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Feb. 12 at the Guthrie Theater.

"Mom was such a trailblazer."

— Missy Staples Thompson