
The first woman House speaker (for a day)

While Rep. Dee Long (DFL-Mpls) may be the newly elected speaker of the House, she is not the first woman to bang the gavel on the House floor. That honor goes to Hannah J. Kempfer of Erhard, Minnesota.

A native Norwegian, Kempfer came to the United States at age six, and later farmed in Otter Tail County before winning election to the House in 1923. She was one of four women elected that year who served as Minnesota's first female representatives.

She was highly respected by her colleagues and given the moniker "The Lady from Otter Tail County." Those same colleagues appointed her honorary speaker for the day on Jan. 28, 1925.

News of Kempfer's early speakership-

for-a-day was brought to the attention of Sen. Cal Larson (IR-Fergus Falls), who then issued a press release. Kempfer's niece lives in the senator's legislative district.

Shortly after then-Speaker John Johnson turned over the podium, a proposal to increase the gasoline tax was hotly debated. The press later reported that Kempfer "had little trouble keeping the 128 male representatives in order."

Characterized as a "progressive member of the conservative party" who championed laws protecting women and children in industry, Kempfer continued to serve in the House until 1929, and was again elected from 1933-41. She died two years later at the age of 63.



Hannah Kempfer, *left*, was described in an old newspaper account as "economical to the nth degree."

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Minnesota Historical Society