



Mrs. Hicks G. Griffiths, A.B. '34, first woman member of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee.

Fearless alumna into male stronghold

Martha Wright Griffiths of Detroit, a noted Missouri graduate, is a mailman's daughter who has been debating foreign trade since high school, and now she has invaded the male stronghold of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee. The Democratic congresswoman, who answers to Mrs. Hicks G. Griffiths, says: "My father always was adamant against high protective tariffs years ago in Pierce City, Mo. That's how I got interested in it. I debated the subject for the high school debating team and have been following it ever since." She says that foreign trade and tariff agreements will be her main concern on the Ways and Means group. Mrs. Griffiths soon will have her chance to debate the matter where it counts—on the 25-member tax-writing Ways and Means Committee. Elected to the post by a party caucus,

she is the first woman ever to serve on the committee.

Mrs. Griffiths is serving her eighth year in the House, representing a middle class suburban area with a population of more than 500,000. A "tower of strength" behind her legal and legislative career, she says, is her husband, to whom she was married in 1933 while the two were undergraduates at the University of Missouri.

"He cheered me on," she says. "He insisted I go to law school, and he insisted I get into politics." After leaving Missouri, both enrolled in the University of Michigan law school. The Griffiths, who are childless, were partners in a law firm in the 1940s. She developed a reputation as a sharp trial lawyer and for ten months held an interim appointment on the bench of Recorder's Court in Detroit—a catch-all criminal court. She served in the Michigan General Assembly from 1948 to 1952.

Mrs. Griffiths lives alone in a small apartment near the Capitol when Congress is in session, returning to Detroit nearly every weekend. Her husband frequently visits her in Washington. She reads a lot in her spare time—"everything but fiction." She is an avid summer gardener at her farm near Romeo, Mich.

In December, 1958, Mrs. Griffiths, accompanied by Mr. Griffiths, returned to the Missouri campus where she received a Citation of Merit during Arts and Science Week; the award was presented by the University Alumni Association and the College of Arts and Science. She has received many honors. Awards for outstanding service were presented to her by the United Church Women of America, the National Council of Churches, and the Business and Professional Women's Club. In 1953 she was chosen by the Detroit Free Press as one of the twelve outstanding Women of Achievement in Detroit, and in 1956 Redbook magazine chose her as one of ten members of Congress who have done the most for young people. Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths each earned A.B. degrees at M.U. in 1934.

The Detroit News, in a recent editorial, "Victory for Women," had this to say about her new post:

"Michigan's first big 'first' of the New Year and this nation's 'first' in all history today is Congresswoman Martha W. Griffiths, of Detroit's 17th District. She becomes the first woman to sit on the House Ways and Means Committee, the most powerful revenue-raising, tax-assessing, budget-adjusting group in Congress.

"Housewives are going to look up from wrestling with the problem of stretching their husband's income over the expenses of their families and snap, 'It's about time!' Women won the right of national suffrage 42 years ago this year, do more than half the unpaid chores in every political campaign.

"When Mrs. Griffiths, thoroughly qualified and widely admired, became a candidate for one of the two vacancies on the 25-member committee, in a congressional election year, veteran congressmen fled the barricades they had held against women for 173 years."