

# Roxanne Jones: Senatorial Gadfly

by Vicki Koon

She pricks the conscience of the Senate with pleading and prodding for legislation that is fair to all the people of Pennsylvania. She is determined to tell the truth to both her constituents and her colleagues in the Senate. She is, as she says, "a Real politician." She is Roxanne Jones, the first black woman to be elected to the Pennsylvania State Senate. How she got to the Senate is a classic story of how misfortune can be conquered and used to one's advantage.

Senator Jones had no aspirations to go into politics, as a matter of fact, she wanted to be a ballet dancer. The early 1960's instead found her sick, jobless, and alone with two young daughters to raise. She honestly didn't know where to turn. Her doctor told her about welfare and urged her to apply. She did. And as she says, "It was a day of my life I'll never forget." When she says these words it is easy to see that she really has not forgotten. "The intake worker treated me as though I was a murderer. I had been working since I was 13, had given to charities all my life, was a good citizen and was being treated this way." It was only through the help of a local politician that she was able to get the aid that she was legally entitled to. Pennsylvania should be thankful, for Roxanne Jones, Activist, was born that day.

Roxanne Jones became an activist because she realized that poor people need a strong grass roots organization to fight for their interests. She became an activist in 1966 and by 1968 she was made city wide chair of the Philadelphia Welfare Rights Organization. In this position she was able to increase the membership from 600 to over 3,000.

Senator Jones did many things as an activist. In 1976 she had the opportunity to view Nixon's budget proposal, which she discovered allotted \$2700 for expenses for Nixon's dog



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## Capital College Team Bowls For Big Brothers/Big Sisters

Picture by Jan Travers



Meet the Penn State, Harrisburg Celebrity Bowling Team. From left, Janet Widoff, student activities coordinator; Mark Widoff, criminal justice instructor; Ruth Leventhal, provost and dean of Penn State, Harrisburg; Cindy Morris, secretary in student activities; Jean Meltz, student. On Saturday, March 28, this team participated in the Celebrity Day at Red Crown Lanes in Harrisburg. Each participant was invited to bowl one game and to secure sponsors for the benefit of Tri-County Big Brothers/Big Sisters. The annual "Bowl for Kids Sake" is responsible for 80 percent of the yearly operating budget of the program. This year's campaign was expected to raise \$75,000.

when at the same time a welfare family of four was expected to live on \$2400. Senator Jones says that you only have to look at the budget to see who the government cares about.

When the Pennsylvania legislature was going to lower the Senior Citizens check from \$69.00 to \$21.00 she came to Harrisburg as a lobbyist. She says she couldn't sleep for people calling her at night. She had people from all over the state ready to testify before the Senate Appropriations Committee, and the Senate closed the door on them. That was the one time that she went to jail. "They told me I broke the windows out of the building," she says. But the five days weren't uselessly spent, for she organized while she was in jail.

"The government has done a real good job of brainwashing people," she says. "One of its biggest myths is that poor people are lazy, shiftless, and don't want to work." "I'm not buying any of that stuff. You should hear them on the floor. Everytime one of them starts with that malarky I sit them right down. You know why - I'm real. I've been there. I lived it and I breathed it, and I'm a woman that's not afraid of any man."

"They don't want people off of welfare," she says. "It's a lie. They want to keep them there so they can lie to you so they can spend the money the way they want to." When she tried to set up a program with Temple University to get welfare mothers a college education she found "that we're not shiftless any longer, we're not lazy. All of a sudden they want us in the home." "You've heard the term Welfare Fraud?" she asks. That is due mostly to not having a system set up, she says. "If you were poor and got a check in the mail that you weren't supposed to have, what would you do," she asks. "Anytime you have poor people up against the wall, they are going to come out fighting."

"I am determined to point these things out. I'm not hung up on 'OK, I'm a State Senator' and that's a big deal. To me, it's not big enough. I've not been able under the Republican administration to do all the things I want to do. I will become impressed when I can create jobs across the commonwealth. When I can say they have dealt with my legislation, and that everybody that wants to work Can work."

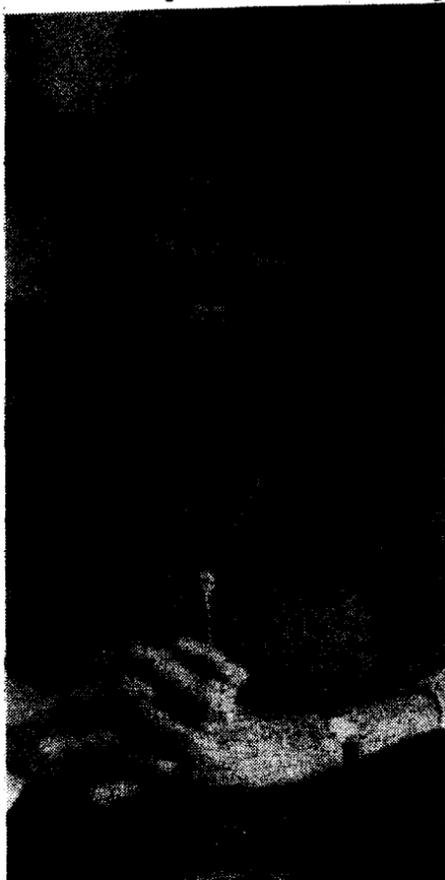
"It's good to be humble, and it's good to remember where you came from," Senator Jones says. More women should get into politics, she says, because "women are sensitive." And being sensitive to the issues and in touch with her constituents is most important to her. She chides her listeners, "All we have to do in life is put ourselves in somebody else's place that is less fortunate than we are, and the world would be a better place." "Sometimes you have to stand up to be a man or a woman, and you have to let people know that you are sincere." Senator Jones does that well.

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