

Women in the Oklahoma Legislature

LESSON 6

PATHS TO SERVING in the State Legislature are varied. Teachers, lawyers, real estate agents, homemakers, and even a librarian or two have been elected to a seat in the legislature. Hannah Atkins, a law librarian, was the first African American woman elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives (1968). She served twelve years then became Secretary of State.



Hannah Atkins

In an interview with Dr. Tanya Finchum, she shared a philosophy her parents had instilled in her. "I've always had what I call good work ethics. I was brought up to, whatever you do, put all your talents into it. That's what my mother and father taught us. Don't shortchange any job because you end up being shortchanged."

Hannah also had a plan for how to approach her colleagues. She stated, "I got more bills passed that time than any other person in the House because I was an early bird. I would go out to the Capitol early and have breakfast with the 'good 'ole boys'. At breakfast, we would sit around while they were sipping on their coffee and decide who was gonna speak for this bill and who was gonna speak for that one, and who would vote, and then we would trade off, you know. You vote for me and I'll vote for you...and sometimes my vote was the crucial vote, and that's how the breakfast meetings worked out." Hannah's breakfast meetings earned her the nickname, "Tea-Sipping Lady."

Hannah Atkins' oral history can be found at
www.library.okstate.edu/oralhistory/wotol/atkins/index.htm

ACTIVITY

Discuss Hannah Atkins' attitude of working hard no matter what you are doing. How do you feel about that? What is your personal philosophy in regards to accomplishing a task ahead of you? What strategies would you use when working with people who have different opinions than yours?