

Remembering Babette Josephs, Progressive Legislator, Activist, and Friend

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

After 28 years of outstanding service as our Representative in the Pennsylvania House, Babette Josephs passed away on Friday, August 27. The next day, U.S. Representative Dwight Evans (D-PA, 3rd District), posted this tribute online: "Sincerest condolences to family and friends of Rep. Babette Josephs. My former colleague was a fierce advocate for her district and those too often forgotten. She stood up and spoke out for those who could not. A liberal lion who feared no one. Rest in Power."

In the 1970s, Babette Josephs and I became friends when she was head of the local chapter of the National Women's Political Caucus, and I was head of the Women's Rights Committee of the League of Women Voters of Philadelphia. It was an exciting time for women's rights. Our two organizations, among others, helped to pass the Pennsylvania Equal Rights Amendment in 1971 and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, a federal law, in 1974.

During *International Women's Year* in 1975, we were members of the Women's Action Alliance, a coalition of women's organizations supporting the *National Women's Agenda*. Joined by 94 women's groups and labor unions, the Agenda advocated for fair representation in government, an end to racial and cultural stereotyping, recognition of working women, recognition of homemakers as workers, women's bodily autonomy and integrity, equal credit for women, and support for women in poverty and women affected by the criminal justice system.

Women's organizations encouraged all women to attend meetings and conferences, write and call government officials and legislators, sign petitions, lobby, march, and demonstrate. And yet, we realized more was needed. At that time there were few women elected to office. Women who could afford to were not even contributing to campaigns.

Ultimately, we all realized that the path to women's rights required having more women in government. So, jointly, our two organizations ran seminars on *Women in Politics*, featuring local female elected officials, campaign managers, and fundraisers as speakers. These events were well attended, and inspired many women to run for office and to get involved in political campaigns.

Meanwhile, Ms. Josephs had enrolled in Rutgers-Camden School of Law; she earned her law degree in 1976, and became a practicing attorney specializing in women's issues. She first entered politics as our local Committeeperson. She took this job seriously: Before each election, she thoroughly researched the candidates and ballot questions, and sent out letters to her constituents detailing her recommendations and reasoning. Even after she was no longer our committeeperson, I would ask for her opinions.

In 1985, Ms. Josephs was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for the 182nd district, and had a brilliant and successful career not only representing our neighborhood but also standing up for the rights of women, children, and LGBTQ people, voting rights, abortion rights, quality public education, racial equality, energy efficiency, and services for seniors and low-income people.

In October 2012, Ms. Josephs was honored by Americans for Democratic Action, the National Organization for Women, and the American Civil Liberties Union. The longest-serving woman in the Pennsylvania House, she retired at the end of 2012, after 14 consecutive terms over 28 years. In April 2016, the Center City Residents' Association presented her with the Lenora Berson Community Service Award.

Her *Philadelphia Inquirer* obituary, published September 5, contains glowing tributes from her family and from former Governor Ed Rendell, Mayor Jim Kenney, and former U.S. Representative Bob Brady. <https://www.inquirer.com/obituaries/babette-josephs-obituary-philadelphia-politics-20210902.html>

To the Honorable Babette Josephs: Thank you for your service! We will miss you.



PA Representative Babette Josephs.