


BONNIE COLEMAN (D-NJ-12)**IN OFFICE**

Up for re-election in 2016


1st Term


Elected in 2014


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BGOV BIOGRAPHY

By Jim Myers, Bloomberg News

Bonnie Watson Coleman, capping a public career of almost five decades, secured her place in New Jersey's political history by becoming the first black woman to serve as the majority leader of the state General Assembly and as chairwoman of the Democratic State Committee.

After more than 16 years in the state legislature, the Camden native now moves to the U.S. House -- where she is the first African-American woman to represent New Jersey -- to write a new chapter and push what she calls her "progressive" goals.

"Congress and our legislature can always benefit from having someone that sees the issues and the needs and opportunities through the lens of both women and the minorities," she told the Star-Ledger newspaper.

Her record in the New Jersey Assembly reinforces her assertion that she holds "strong progressive values." For example, her rating for 2013 from the American Conservative Union was 0 percent, and her rating from the National Rifle Association was an F.

"I will work with President Obama to advance his agenda for civil rights, on increasing a minimum wage so it represents a living wage, on supporting gun safety measure and on fighting for strong education funding," she said on her campaign website.

Other top priorities for Watson Coleman's include passing comprehensive immigration legislation, extending rights to gays, cutting the nation's dependence on fossil fuels and supporting abortion rights. She also has served notice she plans to take on those she blames for blocking that agenda.

"Now more than ever, we need bold progressive leaders to stand up to Koch brother-backed Tea Party obstructionists as they spend millions of dollars to combat progressive causes to spread gridlock and animosity," Watson Coleman said. She was referring to super-political action committees, linked to billionaires David and Charles Koch, which promote small

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government and aren't required to disclose their donors.

Even in an area of foreign affairs where she cites her "style of working across the aisle," Watson Coleman makes it clear she wants to curtail military involvement and focus on diplomatic solutions.

An example of Watson Coleman's approach to controversies gained attention early in the election cycle when she left a special legislative panel investigating lane closures on the George Washington Bridge, calling for Republican Governor Chris Christie to resign over the scandal.

Early Years

Watson Coleman's participation in central New Jersey public life spans almost five decades, beginning with the state Department of Public Safety's civil rights division, where she was a senior investigator. She also worked for affirmative action and equal employment opportunities for the state Transportation Department and was a community affairs adviser to Democratic Governor Jim Florio.

Education has been a particular interest. In 1981 she was named to the board of trustees of Richard Stockton College, a post she held for 17 years.

Coinciding with that for 10 years was her membership on the New Jersey Governing Boards Association of State Colleges.

She also served for two years on the planning board of her home town of Ewing Township.

Watson Coleman grew up in a political family, with her father, John Watson, serving in the New Jersey Assembly. She recalls him leading family discussions about politics at the dinner table. After he died, she ran for his Assembly seat and was elected in 1997.

Watson Coleman chaired the Assembly's Appropriations Committee from 2002 to 2005 before becoming the first black woman to serve as the majority leader, a post she held from 2006 to 2009. Coleman became the majority conference leader in 2014.

During her time in the legislature, she also was a member of the New Jersey Democratic State Committee from 2002 to 2006, becoming the panel's first African-American chairwoman.

In 2014, when eight-term Democratic Representative Rush Holt decided to retire, Watson Coleman entered the race. In the Democratic primary she chalked up a victory in the four-candidate race, capturing 42 percent. Her opponents included a state senator and a state assemblyman.

Published Aug. 19, 2014

BIO FROM REPRESENTATIVE'S WEBSITE

From the Representative's Website

B.A. Thomas Edison State College, Rutgers University. OCCUPATION- Legislator.

PUBLIC/PARTY SERVICE - N.J. Democratic State Committee 2002-06, Chair; Ewing Township Planning Board 1996-97; N.J. Governing Boards Association of State Colleges 1987-98, Chair 1991-93; Richard Stockton College of New Jersey Board of Trustees 1981-98, Chair 1990-91. LEGISLATIVE SERVICE- General Assembly 1998-present, Majority Leader 2006-09, Appropriations Committee Chair 2002-05.

PERSONAL PROFILE

COMMITTEES

[House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform](#)

[House Committee on Homeland Security](#)

CAUCUSES

Birthdate 02/06/1945

Birthplace Camden, NJ

Political Party Democratic Party

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Education

Thomas Edison State College
Bachelor's Degree 1985

Congressional Progressive Caucus	Marital Status	Married	
Congressional Black Caucus			1998 - 2006 State Assembly Member, (NJ)General Assembly 2006 - 2009 State Assembly Member, (NJ)General Assembly 2009 - 2014 State Assembly Member, (NJ)General Assembly 01-03-2015 - Present Representative:New Jersey, (US)House of Representatives
Public Broadcasting Caucus	Spouse	William E. Coleman, Jr.	
	Residence	Ewing Township, NJ	
	Family	3 children; 2 grandchildren	
	Religion	Baptist	