

**WHAT ANITA HILL HATH WROUGHT
SHE GOT SOME HELP FROM THE BOYS ON THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE IN
GENERAL - AND FROM THE SENIOR SENATOR FROM PENNSYLVANIA IN
PARTICULAR.**

By CAROL TRACY, *Philadelphia Inquirer*

With the U.S. Senate campaign in full swing in Pennsylvania, both candidates are releasing position papers and speaking out on a wide range of important policies.

Despite the candidates' insistence that this is not a single-issue race, there is one issue that everyone knows is at the crux of the confrontation: the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas controversy - last year's October surprise - and the spectacle the Senate Judiciary Committee caused in mishandling it.

This is, after all, what got Lynn Yeakel in the race in the first place, and turned what should have been an easy re-election for Arlen Specter into the race of his life. This one event catapulted record numbers of women to seek public office and triggered discontent among female voters toward male office holders like nothing else in my lifetime. This issue won't go away. And it shouldn't go away - at least not until those "who just didn't get it" get it, one way or the other.

Unlike many other Americans who passionately believe one side or the other in this controversy (such as Barbara Lerner, who recently argued in Specter's defense on this page), I found the forum - the Senate hearings - so inherently unfair that I could not even reach a conclusion regarding Hill's allegations. I have been working for more than 20 years on women's rights issues, and I have personally been involved in numerous cases involving sexual harassment.

I know too well that sexual harassment is not a partisan issue. Yet the so-called hearing on Hill's allegations was run purely on a partisan basis - there was no real attempt to determine the truth. The problem was not what the answers to questions were so much as what questions were not asked of Hill or Thomas by either side.

Important questions were not asked because the answers were not known in advance (unlike legal proceedings where most questions are answered during the discovery process prior to a trial) and our esteemed senators did not want to risk finding out the truth.

What was clear to me during those hearings was the total ineptitude and incompetence of the men on the Judiciary Committee. First they underestimated the significance of Hill's allegations and then subjected this country to the most self-serving and hypocritical display of government at work.

Then Arlen Specter took on the highly questionable role of prosecutor. His infamous accusations of perjury did not relate to Hill's sexual-harassment allegations against Thomas, but concerned her interaction with Senate staff about her testimony. Perjury, as Specter and any first-year law student well know, requires a willful and absolute assertion of a false statement.

Hill repeatedly responded to Specter's interrogation with statements to the effect of "I'm not sure," or "I'm not remembering a lot on that issue," statements far short of what is required for a finding of perjury. Beyond that, though, for a person who purports to be a friend to women, Specter's accusation of perjury in connection with sexual harassment shows remarkable insensitivity to the fears most women have of what they will face in confronting sexual abuse. To allege perjury inappropriately, in a nonlegal proceeding and in the context of her statement, makes it an important campaign issue and a very serious problem for Specter.

Hill's allegations were relatively minor, compared with accounts of the Navy Tailhook incident and the experiences of some women in the Persian Gulf conflict - not to mention numerous cases in legal textbooks. However, they reflect those of many American women about their own or friends' experiences in the labor force. And women who have suffered the petty indignities of inappropriately sexualized workplace incidents or more brutal and degrading workplace sexual assaults reacted very strongly.

The conduct of the 14 men on the Judiciary Committee turned the reaction to rage, and Specter's extraordinary insensitivity became a call to action for many women.

His explanation is simply that his party asked him to do the interrogation and he was just doing his job. His party. His party's woman-bashing by ridiculing and degrading single mothers and working women at their national convention bordered on a witch hunt.

As for "just doing his job" Sen. Specter makes his own decisions about right and wrong - that's what we elect him to do - so he cannot escape his conduct simply by blaming it on duty. Nor can he avoid the guilt he must shoulder for the insensitivity to the true concerns underlying the Hill-Thomas issue with which he "did his duty" simply by pointing to his responsiveness to women's concerns in the past.

In fact, it is precisely Specter's past sensitivity to women's issues that should have made him aware of the callousness of the role he chose to take.

Less than 20 years ago, when the first shelter for battered women in Philadelphia was opening, it was accused of breaking up the family. Rape victims were treated like the scourge of the earth. Women with health problems were routinely treated as hysterics. Sexual harassment didn't even have a name. Thanks - it should be noted - to people and organizations like Lynn Yeakel and Women's Way in the last two decades, we have broken the oppressive silence that has kept so many women subjugated.

Whatever the merit of Hill's charges - and neither Specter nor anyone else on the committee shed much light on that question - the hearings began to illuminate the larger issue of sexual harassment in a way that the debates over rape, abuse and women's health have been enlightened and changed already.

The behavior of the men on the Judiciary Committee demonstrated that the social change brought about in these other aspects of our society has not reached them. The obvious change needed, therefore, is a change in their ranks.

