



# Emily's List: Chicks With Checks

*The Year of the Woman produces the PAC of the Year.*

by Susan Hirschmann

**E**ver since Anita Hill was shamed before an all-male Senate Judiciary Committee, activist women have been itching to get back at the political system. The feminist backlash, we have been endlessly told, is responsible for vaulting four new women senators and twenty-five new congresspersons into office in last year's election cycle.

What the American press didn't tell you is that "The Year of the Woman" was for a very select group indeed, and had more to do with ideology than sisterhood. If you weren't the kind of gal that goes for big government, higher taxes, federal funding of abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, gun control, and all kinds of government quotas and mandates, then *sister*, you weren't woman enough to make it to the gravy train!

For in addition to the free media hype, liberal Democratic women running for office in 1992 hit the fund-raising jackpot. The single largest source of this bonanza was the political action committee Emily's List, which stands for "Early Money Is Like Yeast" (it makes the dough rise). It was founded in 1985 by IBM heiress Ellen Malcolm after her involvement in the unsuccessful Senate campaign of feminist Harriet Woods. Malcolm envisioned the PAC as a means of providing pro-abortion, pro-ERA Democratic women candidates with large amounts of money early in the election cycle. The idea is that these initial contributions would serve as seed money to encourage big

donors and PACs to contribute as well. Malcolm, who still directs the day-to-day operations of the thirteen-woman staff in offices down the street from the White House, has been called the Queenmaker of the Democratic Party, and in 1992 her attention paid off: Emily's List raised \$6.2 million

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for its slate of fifty-five Democratic women candidates, making it the largest single contributor to congressional and Senate races last year.

Emily's List's donors are a virtual *Who's Who* of the "cultural elite." Its Federal Election Commission (FEC) reports shine brightly with stars: Roseanne Arnold and hubby, Helen Reddy, Norman Lear, Lily Tomlin, and Marlo Thomas, to name only a few. Writers and journalists are also prominent, from trash novelist Judith Krantz and *Nation* editor/socialite Katrina vanden Heuvel to *Playboy* boss Christie Hefner. Also contributing some of their own money are leaders such as Molly Yard, past president of the National Organization for Women, and homosexual activist Tim McFeeley of the Human Rights Campaign Fund.

Although Emily's List was around long before the Thomas-Hill controversy, the judge's 1991 confirmation hearings gave the PAC a huge boost. Today it claims that outrage over those hearings boosted membership sevenfold, going from an organization of 3,500 members who raised \$1.5 million dollars in 1990 to 24,000 members and the \$6.2 million raised last year. Not that this transformation was entirely spontaneous. Shortly after the hearings, Emily's List began receiving a barrage of flattering media profiles, including a puff piece on "60 Minutes" and articles in the *Seattle Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *National Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. This kind of free advertising during an election cycle is a fund-raiser's dream, and Emily's List candidates profited immensely. Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun, who based her entire campaign on the I-believe-Anita line, was hand-fed almost \$340,000 from Emily's List—more than the National Federation of Independent Businesses gave to all of its candidates combined. The two other prominent Senate winners—Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein—roped in almost \$355,000 and \$300,000, respectively. Patty Murray, the tennis-shoed senator from Washington state, collected \$200,000. (In Pennsylvania, Lynn Yeakel received more than \$580,000 from Emily's List to give Sen. Arlen Specter the scare of his life.)

Campaign finance laws limit PAC contributions per candidate to \$5,000 in the primary and another \$5,000 during the general election, but Emily's List skirted these restrictions with a technique it pioneered, called "bundling." Rather than write its own checks to candidates (and thereby subject itself to the above restrictions), Emily's List asks donors to send individual checks made out not to the PAC but to the campaigns of candidates it selects. Emily's List then "bundles" all the checks for each candidate and forwards them to the campaign offices of their chosen candidates, thereby maximizing the effect of individual donations.

Of course, Emily's list is also in the business of taking contributions for itself. Its members tend to be well-heeled and pay between \$100 to \$5,000 directly to Emily's List to help defray the costs of recruiting, grooming, and preparing profiles of endorsed candidates. In addition to these initial contributions, donors must promise to give at least \$100 to two or more of the *candidates* on Emily's List, thus setting the bundling process in motion.

This arrangement offers three benefits that are hard to beat. First, there is absolutely no legal limit to the amount of money that can be bundled to any single candidate. Second, donors are more likely to give, because they know that their contributions will have a greater political impact if bundled with thousands of others. Finally, a candidate who gets her name on Emily's List sends a strong signal to the liberal PAC community that she is a friendly and financially viable office-seeker.

The profiles of Emily's List candidates usually overlook this last point, and it's not hard to see why. The PAC likes to

portray its candidates simply as Democrats who care deeply about abortion and women's rights. But most of Emily's List candidates also receive large PAC contributions from a host of organizations whose agendas might suggest otherwise, from big labor (the International Brotherhood of Electrical

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Workers, the Sheet Metal Workers of America, Communication Workers of America, COPE, the AFL-CIO, the International Association of Machinists, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers), environmental groups (the Sierra Club), and left-wing special interest groups (the Human Rights Campaign Fund, the Women's Campaign Fund, the National Abortion Rights Action League, the Hollywood Women's Political Committee).

Now, candidates such as freshman California senator Barbara Boxer, a prominent feminist running in a high-profile Senate race, may not need Emily's List to attract this liberal PAC money. But such relative unknowns as Peggy Lautenschlager, who ran unsuccessfully against incumbent Rep. Tom Petri in Wisconsin, and Karan English, who won an open seat in Arizona, were able to bring in comparable PAC support at least partly because of endorsements from Emily's List. In fact, so tight is the relationship between Emily's List and these liberal PACs that PACs ranging from the Machinists and the United Auto Workers to the National Education Association make direct contributions to Emily's List. (PACs usually contribute to candidates, not other PACs.)

Even in a constituency where liberal Democrats have to mask their views, Emily's List can make a difference. That was amply demonstrated in the election of liberal Democrat Karen Shepherd to Utah's second congressional

district, in the heart of which lies Salt Lake City—world headquarters of the Mormon Church. Despite having accepted money from Molly Yard as well as feminist, pro-abortion, and homosexual PACs, Shepherd portrayed herself as “pro-family” in the campaign. After all, she is “married with children,” while her pro-life, conservative, Mormon opponent was single. Emily’s List produced more than \$80,000 for Shepherd, which, when combined with environmental, union, and feminist contributions, gave her a financial edge that her opponent simply could not overcome. The lesson? That the candidate who has the money to make the media buys can dictate the message and tone of the campaign.

**O**n paper, Emily’s List asks only that candidates support federally funded abortions and the ERA in return for an endorsement. In practice, however, its candidates are consistently to the left on fiscal and foreign policy issues as well. The voting records of incumbents who serve as Honorary Advisers help flesh out the Emily’s List ideal. Maryland Senator Barbara Mikulski is a prominent member of its advisory board; Emily’s List boasts of having poured \$150,000 into her 1986 race. Mikulski scored a cumulative 25 percent rating with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and only 14 percent with the National Federation of Independent Businesses for the 102nd Congress. Other members of Emily’s advisers scored even lower. Colorado Rep. Pat Schroeder registered a flat zero with the NFIB, as did Barbara Boxer. On the same scale, Reps. Nancy Pelosi, Nita Lowey, Louise Slaughter, and Jolene Unsoeld managed only 9 percent. In a year when their own candidate for President was reminding himself that “it’s the economy, stupid,” this is not an encouraging trend.

The candidates themselves give every indication that they will live up to the standards of their mentors. Not one of the fifty-five Emily’s List candidates signed the Americans for Tax Reform’s “No New Taxes Pledge.” Nor did any receive the support of the NFIB, the Business Industry PAC, or the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Indeed, most of the Emily’s List candidates were strongly opposed by the business community as well as the social conservatives.

Out on the campaign trail, the record of Emily’s List candidates was mixed. To be sure, tactics like bundling demonstrated a degree of sophistication hitherto absent from the radical feminist community; bundling still left Emily’s List free to use its maximum \$5,000 PAC contributions in kind, sending in its own advisers to consult, poll, and do mailings. Emily’s List also showed political savvy in selecting candidates only in viable districts, and in taking

full advantage of the check-kiting and other congressional scandals. On top of this, it keyed in on several of the newly drawn “minority” districts created by new judicial interpretations of the Voting Rights Act, which now requires that minorities be given maximum opportunity to elect their own to Congress. In 1992, this meant the drawing of thirteen new black and six new Hispanic seats, almost all of them in heavily Democratic areas. Emily’s List took advantage of the primaries, when it could get the most bang for its buck, and targeted not only the new districts but also other races in which there were no incumbents running. In many, winning the primary was tantamount to winning the congressional seat.

In North Carolina, for example, the first congressional district was redrawn with a 54-percent-black voter base. This was also a district in which the winner of the Democratic primary would face no serious Republican opponent in the general election. In targeting the first district, Emily’s List supported new Rep. Eva Clayton to the tune of \$55,000. She faced six other Democratic candidates and landed in a runoff with the son of the retiring 26-year incumbent. Her victory is a case study of the impact that early sup-

port can have in crowded, low-turnout primaries.

The open seats were important, because they meant no incumbent advantage in money. Including the newly drawn minority districts, Emily’s List bundled to thirty-one, winning twenty-one. In Oregon, a \$115,000 contribution from Emily’s List helped propel Oregon Peace Institute founder and liberal activist Elizabeth Furse to a come-from-behind victory in the state’s first district. In Pennsylvania’s 13th district, Emily’s \$70,000 helped candidate Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky squeak by Republican John Fox by fewer than 1,500 votes in a district that has a two-to-one GOP advantage and had been held by a Republican for seventy-six years.

**A**lthough winning twenty-five of their fifty-five races is impressive given Emily’s radical positions, the PAC suffered some setbacks in the Year of the Woman. Indeed, most of its winners ran on platforms of “change” rather than the beliefs that attracted all the liberal PAC money. In some cases, the candidate was so liberal that she couldn’t help herself and her true beliefs became a hot issue. Emily’s losing candidate in California’s 11th congressional district, Patti Garamendi, ran her whole campaign on abortion rights, gay rights, and support for Ice-T, the rapper of “Cop Killer” fame. While most of her contributions came from liberal Hollywood (Emily’s pitched in \$60,000), this was a conservative district (despite the 51-39 percent Democratic advantage in

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registration) largely composed of farmers and ranchers. Her opponent, rancher Richard Pombo, refused to be intimidated by all the nasty name-calling and gave Garamendi enough rope with which to hang herself. She defended Ice-T in ads that showed burning crosses and called Pombo a racist. But Pombo held fast to the high ground and won.

Then there was Cathy Steinberg in Georgia, defeated because her opponent, John Linder, was smart enough to derail her efforts to run on the "woman's platform." He stuck to bread-and-butter politics and defined how liberal she was on economic questions.

Running against incumbents, Emily's List fared even worse. Even though it raised nearly \$80,000 in an effort to defeat Florida Rep. E. Clay Shaw, more than \$45,000 against California Rep. John Doolittle, and almost \$135,000 against Iowa Rep. Jim Lightfoot, to name but a few, it was to no avail—incumbents had the money to attack back and define how radical the Emily's List candidates were. (The only incumbent taken out by bundling was California Sen. John Seymour, and most would agree that he was more of a threat to himself than anyone was to him.)

Lightfoot, for instance, defeated his opponent in part by running ads showing a dirty-fingernailed blue-collar worker reaching for his wallet, which a red-fingernailed hand was about to grab. But even if a candidate feels he can win by emphasizing differences, a bigger problem is the relative

anonymity of the fledgling PAC. "Emily's list is the biggest stealth organization on the left," says Doolittle. "Most conservatives don't even know who they are—let alone how radical. When they came after me with tens of thousands of dollars, I first had to explain to my supporters who they were."

To celebrate its tremendous successes in 1992, Emily's List held a headline-grabbing Inaugural Week luncheon at the Washington Hilton, which it called "the largest political fund-raiser for women in the history of this country." The 4,200 attendees watched videos of the '92 women winners to the accompaniment of "Money" (from the musical *Cabaret*, as in "Money makes the world go around") and were cheered by such heroines as Barbara Mikulski, who told them, "Some women spend their lives waiting for Prince Charming to come. I spent my life waiting for Dianne and Carol and Barbara."

Emily's List is now looking to make the 1990s the *Decade of the Woman*. With a million bucks left over in their campaign chest as of February, and another \$750,000 from the Inaugural fund-raiser, they are off to a good start. In 1992, Emily's List had enough money to get out in front and enough novelty to avoid scrutiny into some of the less savory ideologies it bankrolled. That advantage shouldn't last, but for now conservatives have no viable way of countering a PAC that most of them have never even heard of. □

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James Dorsey and Yoav Karny

# New Players in the Middle East

*Welcome to the Caucasus, where a handful of firebrand leaders are vying to lead their nations to an independence they have not enjoyed since Czarist times—and reaching out to strange new allies.*

A short man in his late fifties, Yuri Shanibov hardly strikes one as Caucasia's most wanted man. His mild manners, cultured voice, and sense of history reflect his distinguished academic and legal career rather than his new-found status as a revolutionary determined to reverse 200 years of history. A wall-size map recalling the lost era of Soviet-inspired fraternal internationalism dominates his modest office in the North Caucasian resort of Nalchik. The map's politics contrast starkly with his rebel movement, the Confederation of North Caucasian Mountain Peoples, which is both a product and an engine of violent disintegration. As he explains his vision for the Caucasus, Shanibov's thick fingers move across the map in substitution of his battle-hardened warriors. "Give me a month," he says almost boastfully, "and I'll simply walk into Tbilisi."

Thousands have joined the ranks of Shanibov's Confederation as volunteers willing to die in an attempt to reclaim what was the divine property of a non-Slavic, largely Muslim population until Russian imperialism in the late eighteenth century raised its head. With Abkhazian seces-

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sionists today pushing Georgian troops out of a key Black Sea province linking Georgia with Russia, his troops now see an opportunity to redress perceived historic injustice. Grouping under one umbrella sixteen nations who often have only geography in common, they seek to carve out of Russia and Georgia a new Caucasian state that would stretch from the shores of the Caspian Sea to the estuary of the Don. Such a state would push Russia out of the Middle East and force her to retreat into her sixteenth-century

reclusion. It would also almost certainly redraw beyond recognition the boundaries of the Middle East and spark brutal ethnic conflicts across Eurasia.

Carefully shielded for much of this century from the outside world by Moscow, the Caucasus, whose resistance to the Russian occupation was the most violent the Czarist empire ever encountered, is today emerging from its cocoon. In its minuscule, often artificial autonomous republics, created by Stalin to mix up the races and weaken their sense of nationalism, romantic visionaries and self-serving opportunists plot national liberation. Among them, Shanibov is a prime contender to don the mantle of Imam Shamil, a nineteenth-century Muslim mystic and ascetic who still inspires Islamic militants across the Middle East and Central Asia. The leader of history's last North Caucasian state, Shamil would today be described as an Islamic fundamentalist.