

office. We're not talking chump change."

Ellen Malcolm founded EMILY's List ("Early Money Is Like Yeast"), now one of the largest political action committees, in 1985 to leverage women's giving to pro-choice Democratic women and believes their success belies these assumptions. With average contributions running less than \$100, Malcolm says, "We raised \$11 million in the 2006 election cycle to help elect a record number of women to Congress."

Malcolm argues the biggest impediment to electing women isn't gender or fundraising—it's the power of incumbency. "In the typical election, about 98 percent of incumbents are reelected," she says. "We look for vulnerable Republicans and open seats. But this means that instead of 435 [the total number of House seats] opportunities, you might have 25 where a Democrat could reasonably be expected to win."

Both the WISH List cofounder, Candy Straight, and Judy Singleton, who founded the Lugar Series, point out that the numbers augur in the Democrats' favor. Says Straight, at the start of the primary season, "One hundred forty-six Democratic women are running for the House, and 64 Republican women. The previous record was in 1992, when 140 Democrats and 82 Republicans ran. We Republicans are going the wrong way, while the Democrats are increasing ever so slightly."

Singleton acknowledges that women's unwillingness to place their political careers over family obligations caused the Lugar Series to give up thinking they could get most of their 1,500 graduates to run for office. Instead, they mentor women in the broader—and arguably, self-limiting—approach of influencing politics through public service, from PTA president to managing campaigns.

Dismayingly, every single female political group leader and elected official uttered stunningly similar words. Donna Edwards, the newest female House member (D-MD), admitted, "I went to everybody else to see if they would run. Women do this. We look to everyone else first, mostly to men." Malcolm, of EMILY'S List, says, "Women tend to defer and be asked to run, where men go straight ahead and act on their ambitions."

When the Women's Campaign Forum confronted its failure to enlarge their candidate pool, they asked women politicians why they ran. The almost universal answer? "Because someone asked me."

YES, SHE CAN!

Last year, WCF started "She Should Run," a virally marketed program to get people to nominate women who would make great candidates. "I wish the instinct was coming

from within the women themselves," Goldman says, "but the validation of a third party tells them, 'Yes, I can do this.'"

Brown University's Jennifer Lawless dubs women's pervasive reticence to advance themselves in politics an "ambition gap" and says it's one of the greatest factors holding women back. The fault is not in our stars but in ourselves? Are these political programs misguidedly channeling millions to help women overcome external barriers, real though they are, when the biggest barriers are within?

Clinton has shown beyond any doubt that women can be tough enough, smart enough, persistent enough, ambitious enough, and can raise enough money to compete in the biggest political arena. True, her candidacy has also shown that women who threaten the gender power balance will be subjected to vicious attacks from political opponents and pundits. Still, Clinton's message, "Although we weren't able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time... it's got about 18 million cracks in it," has clearly been delivered to a new generation. Rachel Hirschberg, 36, a political fundraising consultant says, "The system is not set up for women to run... but as more attain high-powered jobs, they'll realize the changes they can make in the world and attain the networks they need to succeed."

Which brings me back to that Emerge Arizona meeting. I asked attendees what motivated them: Eveyette Mendoza, an 18-year-old graduate of the program, says her father beat her mother, and "it wasn't right he had to go to jail for only 24 hours and got away with such horrible acts"; she someday wants to be governor to pass firmer domestic violence laws. Krista Pacion, the Rollerblader, said that as the first generation in her family to finish college she has a commitment to making quality public education available to others.

Lawless cites evidence that women in political office are more likely to prioritize issues that affect women intimately, such as health care, day care, equal pay, and abortion access. I recall a hot Women's Equality Day in August of 1998, when almost every woman in the House of Representatives stood on the Capitol steps, a sea of brightly colored skirts, declaring solidarity across party lines to get federal employees' health insurance coverage for birth control.

That they prevailed is significant, but that they saw the injustice of failing to cover contraception while covering other prescription drugs, including Viagra, happened only because of their gender sensibility—small but significant proof of the WHP's tagline: "Add women, change everything." ●

Meet the most connected women in Washington

DO ALL ROADS LEAD TO SARAH BREWER? If you're a female power player in DC, a helluva lot of them do; the American University lecturer you probably never heard of has formidable ties to **Hillary Clinton**, **Kay Bailey Hutchison**, **Nancy Pelosi**, and scores of other slightly less boldface but still very influential Washington women politicians.

In our survey of influence and power in the capital, we discovered that Brewer is a hub of ideas and policy, as is, not surprisingly, Clinton. The junior senator from New York's 40-odd years in politics earn her the Most Connected Award (not always happily; the battle scars of the primary season have left her with more frenemies than any other woman charted). Coming in only a hair behind Clinton is **Arianna Huffington**, whose combined *Huffington Post*-helming, partygoing and -throwing, and incomprehensible levels of energy (she's on the board of the Renaissance Weekends and headlines the annual "Take Back America" conference; she publishes a daily online newspaper; she ran for California governor against Arnold Schwarzenegger; she writes books) make her the doyenne of DC West. She, along with Pelosi, the San Francisco Speaker of the House, even rated viciously funny impersonations by the comedienne Tracey Ullman. In fact, California girls are doing much political moving and shaking. Huffington's pal, the Los Angeles-based environmentalist **Laurie David**—whom **Maureen Dowd**, anticipating a fun fight, mischievously introduced to Karl Rove at the 2007 White House Correspondents' Dinner—advised Clinton and Barack Obama on global warming. California First Lady **Maria Shriver** famously broke with her husband and some Kennedy cousins in HRC's camp to back Obama. Maybe the new administration should think about setting up a bureau out in L.A., where the fun and money are!

Whichever administration enters Washington in January, it will be doing business with the women on this power grid—dominated by Democrats but not to exclusion. **Cathy McMorris Rodgers**, Republican congresswoman from Washington, earned endorsements from **Jessica Grounds** and **Sarah Brewer**'s Women Under Forty Political Action Committee (and got a congratulatory call from Pelosi when her baby was born). Kay Bailey Hutchison, Republican senator from Texas, has ties to **Anne Wexler**, the most powerful female lobbyist in DC, who gave Clinton her first political job, on George McGovern's campaign. (And according to *Wonkette*, Hutchison "treats Hillary like she's just one of the girls.")

You will notice that while **Claire McCaskill** and Clinton are in this network, it's not for their vice presidential potential. John McCain famously described the duties of that job as "to inquire daily as to the health of the president and...to attend the funerals of third-world dictators." Dick Cheney aside, that doesn't sound too powerful, does it? Nor did we include women whose influence derives from being married to it. The women in this web—legislators and pollsters, journalists and academics, policy wonks and talk show hosts (if the medium is the message, **Oprah Winfrey** remains the go-to girl for any ambitious politician)—all work for their Washington muscle. And if you really want to know who's got juice in DC, watch who walks into the restaurant Citronelle, and take note of where **Mel Davis** seats them.—*VIRGINIA SOLE-SMITH*

RELATIONSHIP KEY

- OLD PALS —————
- WORK CONNECTIONS —————
- COMMON CAUSE —————
- FRENEMIES - - - - -

Opposite page: David, Rosen, Winfrey, Huffington, Clinton, Albright, Shriver, Hutchison; Reuters; Dowd, Pelosi, Aron; Corbis; Hartmann, McCaskill; Getty Images; Quinn, Edwards; AP Photos; Brewer; Jeff Watts/American University; remaining images: courtesy of subjects

THE NETWORK

