

ELLEN MALCOLM
President, EMILY's List

Take Back America Conference
Campaign for America's Future / Institute for America's Future

Special Session: The New Politics of Engagement
Wednesday, June 4, 2003
Washington, DC

I have to confess, as somebody who started changing the world for women in politics by saying a rather odd thing, that early money is like yeast, I have an appreciation of the power of money in politics, even from small contributions, but I was looking at Wes Boyd's numbers and thinking, oh my God, by this election they'll be doing more than we are.

We have had an incredible period at EMILY's List, because I came out of the 2002 election – probably like everybody in this room – thoroughly disgusted by the outcome and the political process, thinking it was time to go back and take stock and to really re-look where we were, at EMILY's List, in bringing women into the political process. You know, it's kind of hard to believe this now, but in 1985, when we started EMILY's List, no one took women seriously in politics. In fact, the only time women were ever recruited to run, was if you were a Democratic woman, you would be asked to run in the most Republican districts in the country. It was a complete losing cause. It was almost the definition of a lost cause, was when they asked women to run. Women couldn't raise money. They were doing bake sales. Barbara Mikulski, our first candidate, used to say she'd run for office doing Bake Sale for Barb, Barbecue for Barb, Bowling for Barb, Baseball for Barb.

And so, we had this very unique idea, back in 1985, that we would create a donor network, and we would ask people to join. We would support pro-choice democratic women running for those top offices – you know, break us through the glass ceiling. We would send information to our members, so you could read all about these women who had a chance of winning, and you could figure out their positions on issues, and what were the dynamics of the race. Then we asked you to write a check to any candidate that you like. The decision was up to you. You made your contribution out to the candidate, sent it back to us and we would forward those contributions onto the campaign.

A very simple idea – very much like MoveOn. A very basic idea of giving information to people, and unleashing their political power by giving them a simple way to support women candidates. Well, in the last election, that simple idea resulted in 101,000 candidate contributions, totaling more than \$9 million to women running. The money made women serious contenders. And as we saw women competing in more and more and more of these big races, and coming out the winners, watching Dianne Feinstein,

Debbie Stabenow, and Hillary Clinton in some of the toughest campaigns in this country, now being able to run and win, the credibility of women shifted.

We've done a lot of things at this little entrepreneurial organization to add on to the other pieces of electing women. By doing that, we have learned some very interesting lessons about the dynamics of electoral politics on our side of the aisle, and some of the problems we face, and perhaps some of the solutions to take us forward.

The second thing we did was realize that we never could find people to work in the campaigns that were trained to be fundraisers, campaign managers, to do research, or get out the vote. So, EMILY's List, over the years, has created one of the best training programs to take young people, give them skills, help them get jobs in campaigns, and work with women who are doing one of our EMILY's List races. From our perspective, to make sure that our women candidates had the most effective campaigns we could possibly build. So, a vacuum was out there in the political world that we moved in to try to fix and find solutions for.

The second piece that we added on to the political program came in 1995, after Republicans took over the Congress, and we had our nice campaign to Boot Newt. We began reaching out to women voters, to bring them back into the political process. We saw, in the '94 elections, a tremendous number of women who had voted in '92 stayed home in 1994. Women's absence in 1994 really turned the Congress over to the Republicans.

EMILY's List – working with Stan [Greenberg] and others – learned a lot about what are different groups of women, how we can market women and try to reconnect voting to their lives. Talk about how important it really was to their families. Stan talked a lot about education. Women believe in education very much, and when you talk about the education of their children and connect it to voting, you give them a reason to go out and vote. We did a lot of work to understand how to reach out to women voters. In this process of going back and re-looking at what EMILY's List has done, and the environment in which we exist in the political world on the Democratic side, some things have really kind of jumped out to us.

One of them is that we have many organizations – and certainly the political parties – that focus much too much on the upcoming election. They do not invest in the future. We have a Democratic National Committee that focuses on the White House, so every four years their mission is to elect a Democratic President. The Democratic Senate Campaign Committee focuses on the Senate races. The DCCC – the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee – focuses on House races. And the mandate of the leaders of those organizations is to win in the next election. There is very little interest in taking resources and building for the future. It's one of the reasons we couldn't find trained people to work in the campaigns, so we started training them.

We'll look at why Democrats have such a tough problem with this new McCain-Feingold law in not having enough hard money. If the Democratic organizations are not investing

in building a dollar network, if they take every single dollar that they can scrape together and put it up on television, then that cold-prospecting, telemarketing, small donor investment that's not there means that we lose out on those hard money dollars. One of the things we have to all do, and certainly what EMILY's List has been doing is looking at a way to build for the future. This is a very important point for all of you who fund these progressive organizations, regardless of the size of your contribution, look for people who consciously will tell you how do you win now, and can explain to you how after the election we're going to be farther along the path to winning in the future.

There are, in these dark times, some wonderful new activities that are taking place, in terms of bringing people together. EMILY's List certainly, it is fair to say, that we have been sole proprietors, and we have worked with others to get out the votes through the state parties. But for the most part, we've sort of stuck to our knitting and gone forward in our own way. I think it's time that we changed that. I think it's time, and I know that other leaders of progressive organizations agree, that we find ways to work together to do better jobs.

I was very proud to host a meeting at EMILY's List with Carl Pope of the Sierra Club, Harold Ickes, Andy Stern from SEIU, bringing together the progressive organizations that get out the vote and have an interest in winning the Presidential election. On May 8, we had our first meeting to find ways to be more efficient, more effective. You, as voters, know exactly what I am talking about when you get 91 pieces of mail on one day, from all these different groups, from the party, from the other organizations. How do we share information? How do we share ideas? How do we make sure that we don't send out the same piece of mail from three different organizations on the very same day? How can we be more effective and more efficient when we know we are going to be outspent like crazy in the next election? I hope and I believe that these conversations are going to move forward. The progressive groups are going to find ways, as we say, to build our own table – to work together and to work with labor and our other allies to make sure that on election day November 2004, the maximum number of voters come out and vote for our Democratic candidate.

Finally, I think that Wes and even EMILY's List and our donor network have talked about effective ways to unleash power – to focus it where it's going to make a difference. I think that women hold a tremendous ability to build the progressive country that we are seeking. The Center for American Women in Politics has documented over and over again that women in office take leadership on the issues that effect women and families. They bring those issues to the forefront. That is creating a progressive agenda. Our women in elected office fight like the devil on the issues we care about. Eighty-four percent of the Democratic women in the House voted against the Iraq resolution. Eighty-four percent. It was Senator Barbara Boxer who led the fight to beat ANWR drilling and took on the Republicans there. It was Connie Murray who took on the fight that added \$2 billion to the education funding in this country when George Bush was leaving most children behind. Women candidates stick to the progressive agenda and they fight for it.

But women voters are the ones that are going to turn this country around. The gender gap has so much power and potential. When we go out and talk about the progressive agenda, it resonates with women. It is women who want a government and see government as an ally, not an enemy, like the Bush Republicans. It is women who find ways to deal with conflict without violence. It is women that have the priorities of helping families, of building communities, of making sure no one is left behind. It is women voters who will turn on the Bush agenda and kick him out of office in November 2004.

So, I can assure you, the new plan for the next ten years of EMILY's List has already started. When I leave this conference, I am going right back to the office to work with EMILY's List to make the most powerful force we can, to mobilize and unleash the power of women to take back America.