

LOS ANGELES TIMES INTERVIEW : Patricia Goldman : Still Trying to Link 'Pro-Choice' and Republican

By KAY MILLS

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If Republican feminist is not an oxymoron these days, it's because of the work of women like Patricia A. Goldman and organizations like WISH List, of which she is president. The acronym stands for "Women in the Senate and House," a nationwide group that raises money for pro-choice Republican women candidates.

Republican women asserting support for a woman's right to choose an abortion--despite the party's official stance to the contrary--established WISH List in 1992. They modeled it after an influential Democratic women's campaign group, EMILY's List (for "Early Money Is Like Yeast"), established by Ellen Malcolm in 1985. In 1993, the WISH List contributed more than \$40,000 to Christine Todd Whitman's successful campaign for governor of New Jersey and \$55,000 to Kay Bailey Hutchison's special election campaign for the U.S. Senate from Texas. Last year, WISH List raised \$370,000 for 40 candidates.

Patricia Goldman, 53, became WISH List president last year as the group launched a concerted expansion effort. Goldman is no stranger to women's causes, having been active in the attempt to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s, or to Washington, where she worked as a Capitol Hill staffer fresh out of Goucher College in 1964. An economics major, Goldman jokes that she was hired as minority counsel for early War on Poverty hearings without a law degree, in part because no attorney could work as cheaply as she, and the congressman doing the hiring--Albert Quie--was a frugal Minnesota farmer. She later served as executive director for the Wednesday Group, which developed legislative and political issues for Republican House members. She was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to a GOP seat on the National Transportation Safety Board in 1979 and reappointed by President Ronald Reagan. In 1988, she left government to become a senior vice president of USAir, retiring from that post in 1994.

Goldman was married to Sen. Charles E. Goodell of New York until his death in 1987. She's now married to Stephen Kurzman, a retired Washington attorney she has known since he worked for the late Sen. Jacob K. Javits, a liberal Republican from

New York, and she for the Joint Economic Committee. “As Steve says, we married in the faith,” she said with a smile.

Question: Is there a place under the Republican Party tent for pro-choice feminists?

Answer: Yes. We have to assert our rights to make sure it’s there. The leaders have indicated that they wish for a place [for us]--as we have heard from party co-chair Evelyn McPhail. But we sometimes have to remind the other activists to move over.

Q: Given the climate, particularly in Washington, how does a moderate Republican woman stay in her skin today?

A: Same way she has for the last number of years: with difficulty but fight.

Q: How long has it been difficult for Republican feminists?

A: We maintain that the Republican Party was the place where women started. It was the party of suffrage, as well as the party of anti-slavery; they went hand in hand. We had the first woman party chairman. When I first came to work on the Hill, you had Frances Bolton [R-Mass.] and Margaret Chase Smith [R-Maine]. There were role models and heroines for us to be with. You [keep going] by working with the issues. I’m more comfortable on the variety of issues that I care about in addition to being a feminist--the economic issues make me feel at home in the Republican Party.

Q: What’s your target for WISH List fund-raising this year?

Kay Mills is author of “From Pocahontas to Power Suits: Everything You Need to Know About Women’s History in America” (Plume). She interviewed Patricia Goldman at a women’s political forum in San Diego.

A: \$1.5 million--which is going to be a big stretch. That will, in large part, depend on the candidates we have. Women’s organizations this year are all having difficulty recruiting candidates.

It’s not just Republican or Democratic. First of all, polls tell us politicians are not highly regarded. Most of us would like to select a career in which we would get some psychic benefit. For women, if they have families--not that this shouldn’t be for men,

too--that's a double burden. Women have a harder time raising money. They know that to begin with.

The candidates we support also tend, because of the nature of the party organizations in some states, to have a major primary fight--so it's going to be even more costly. So, many times the women running have higher budgets than the males might--if they're going to compete on equal terms. It's daunting.

Q: Why did you take this job?

A: I had done some of this type of organizing in the past, and there's a recognition among our members that up until now the WISH List has been retailing--one by one. Now we have to wholesale. We need to really grow in substantial numbers. In politics, issues count, but to get your issues across, there are two major ingredients: one is money, the other is votes. To make sure that our party makes room for our supporters, it has to see that we can raise substantial money to get our ideas across and that we have a large body of people that supports those views.

We know instinctively that they're there. They've gone, many of them, about doing other things, some of them where they've not felt the political landscape has been as welcoming as they might wish. They're still willing to contribute and get back in.

Q: How would you describe the ideology of candidates that the WISH List supports?

A: For those who like to have labels, you might put centrist. The only standard we have is that they be pro-choice. Other than that, you can look at the records of the people we have supported. If you were to take votes on the environment or welfare, they are going to vary depending on what their constituent interests are and what they bring to it.

Gale Norton, whom we've endorsed in Colorado, calls herself a conservative--and she is on a variety of issues. She's running for the Senate, for Hank Brown's seat. She's currently the attorney general, the biggest vote getter in Colorado. If you had to rank people, right and left, she would certainly come out more conservative than a Connie Morella (R-Md.) or Olympia Snowe (R-Maine). But she's still somebody we feel comfortable endorsing.

Q: With a GOP-led Congress that's cutting programs that benefit women and children and a Republican platform that so far opposes abortion, how are you finding many candidates?

A: The candidates are there. They recognize they have to stake out where they agree or disagree. What you're talking about for many of them, which has been a standard for the Republican Party, has been local control.

You say they're cutting programs that affect women and children. Some are cuts; some are changes of management in the way they're done. The presumption has been made that they're going to be cut--and no question some of them will be. Some programs won't be cut; they will be changed in how they're doing it.

What they're doing is saying, "Turn them over to the states and let the states do it." Some people are nervous about this. Some of our people are concerned. Some favor adjustments on how those things are going to be managed and how many standards you give when you turn them over to the states. So while we favor the general principles, we find there's enough room to draw some distinctions.

Q: How does the dominant conservative stance within the national GOP affect your fund-raising ability?

A: It sometimes helps. There are people who're looking for a home. They still are Republicans.

Q: Almost in reaction to--?

A: In reaction, but to make sure their perspective is registered. They feel our organization is one way they can do that. Yes, some people have reacted by leaving the party--but by and large we are an attractive place for people to support.

It's hard for an individual, even when they follow politics--even if they are some place where they get much national news, congressional races are not covered. It's why all the organizations exist, whether it's the League of Conservation Voters or the National Rifle Assn. If you find an organization that reflects your issues, it's through them that you will learn about candidates you may wish to support outside your local area. That's the whole essence of what the WISH List is: If you care about supporting

women for high office who also believe in reproductive rights, then we can tell you about them.

Q: In 1992, women used the all-male Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on Clarence Thomas' Supreme Court confirmation as a symbol for the need for more women in Congress. Will there be any kind of leitmotif like that for women this year?

A: People are looking for those all over. That's one of the things that launched EMILY's List. They were doing such a great job--but also they couldn't have devised something that would have attracted more attention to them.

Q: One poll recently showed that the approval rate for House Speaker Newt Gingrich is among the lowest.

A: Among women, I've been told he's in the single digits.

Q: Can you use reaction to Gingrich as an organizing tool for your WISH List?

A: I don't think anyone in a party gains by throwing things, any more than we would like people to pillory us.

Q: How many candidates do you think the WISH List might back next year?

A: If we backed 40 last year, I would hope we wouldn't do any less. We so far have backed four Senate candidates: Norma Paulus in Oregon, Maggie Tinsman from Iowa, Gale Norton in Colorado and Nancy Mayer in Rhode Island.

Q: Must candidates backed by the WISH List have a strong chance to win or are you willing to gamble a little?

A: They have to have what we call a "viable race." That doesn't mean we expect them to win--because you never know who's going to win. But they have to show that they have a campaign organization and plan; that they have some expectations of raising money--not just from us but on their own. We have some people who come to us who may be pretty nice people, but they haven't a clue what it takes.

Q: How do you personally feel sending women to a Congress that seems to be getting increasingly vitriolic?

A: These aren't babes in the woods--or they wouldn't be in politics. We aren't sending them there--they've chosen to go. They recognize the environment they're getting into, and it's not easy. That's unfortunately why a lot of members, men or women, are quitting. You can't have everybody running against Washington and then turning around and expressing horror and surprise that people have no respect. It's the message they're selling. It's like in "Casablanca" when Louie says, "I'm shocked" that there's gambling going on.

Q: So the WISH List isn't really just a holding action against a different day?

A: It's not a holding action. First of all, it was newly created. We're only three years old--almost four. I see this as not a holding action of what used to be, but a recognition of what has to be done to make a difference--and that's elect Republicans.

Q: What future do you see for the WISH List?

A: I see it growing and supporting more candidates and building strength. And not just this year. We've lost some people. Today, the numbers are fewer. But this is the start of a trend. It's not going back.

It's great for the Democrats to talk about how there were all these women [in Congress]. If we've got problems on these issues for women, the Democrats have had 40 years of control of Congress and nothing happened. And no women in leadership. That's the difference--the women we've supported are in leadership: Susan Molinari [R-N.Y.], Nancy Johnson [R-Conn.]. You have committee chairmanships: Jan Meyers (R-Kan.) is chairman of Small Business, Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.) of Labor and Public Welfare. There's a big difference, these are WISH List people who are there.

So I'm just not going to cede the ground to the Democrats--that they are the party of women who are progressive.