



## Impolitic Pol

by Tom Bethell

Two days after the left-wing Game Show Host addressed the Joint Session of Congress, I journeyed to Capitol Hill, in search of Capitol Ideas.

I was walking along the central corridor of the Capitol building and admiring the waxed, well-polished flagstones, when I spotted, striding in my direction from the Senate side, the tall, upright, blue-suited figure of Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah. I told him that I would shortly be seeing Sen. Al Simpson of Wyoming.

"Hit him hard on employer sanctions," Hatch said briskly. He was referring to the feature of the immigration law that penalizes employers for hiring undocumented ("illegal") immigrants. Its unintended effect was to doom Clinton's first two nominees for attorney general. Thanks in no small measure to the persistent efforts of Senator Simpson, the immigration law was revised in 1986 to include sanctions against employers. Hatch told me that they were "discriminatory" against minorities and placed an inappropriate law-enforcement burden on all. "Senator Kennedy and I are going to change it," Hatch said. "Simpson doesn't want it but we're going to."

As assistant minority leader, Simpson has an office in the Capitol building itself. An aide told me that the senator (who lives in McLean, Virginia) had been held up in traffic. Soon his long, lean frame appeared in the doorway. He smiled broadly and beckoned me to join him in his inner office, across the hall. It was furnished with realistic paintings of Western scenery, including a small Bierstadt, a scene by one of the "Taos Ten," and—point of pride—"no photographs of politicians."

He told me he was writing a book about the news media, which I gather

may not be wholly laudatory. At the time of the Clarence Thomas hearings, after an appearance on "Nightline," Simpson had a run-in with Nina Totenberg of National Public Radio. "She laid the F-word on me three times in 42 seconds," he told me. An aide brought me a cup of coffee, but Simpson himself, who is 61 and looking very fit, abstemiously confined himself to a glass of water. He was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1978. His parents, both in their nineties, still live in Cody. His father also was a U.S. senator, and before that governor of Wyoming.

I never could understand how Simpson became so involved in the immigration issue. Wyoming is believed to have fewer immigrants than any other state. (It also has fewer people.) For years I had darkly suspected that, in the course of some dinner party shortly after he arrived, the "Georgetown elite" had put Simpson up to it, knowing that there would be no constituency pressure on the issue from Wyoming. So how did it happen?

"I was a freshman senator, and they created the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy," he said. "They were looking for lawyers from the Judiciary Committee, and Howard Baker told Jimmy Carter, 'Here's Simpson.' I said to Baker, 'Why did you do that to me?' He said, 'You're the junior member of the Committee, and I think it's important that you go on there.' So Carter appointed me to the Commission. Then the Republicans took over the Senate, in 1980. At that point Senator Kennedy came to me and said, 'Well, I care very much about immigration and if Thurmond will let you set up a separate subcommittee, I'll be glad to serve as your ranking member. I can share with you about seventeen years of background. I know you and I won't

agree on a lot of it.' I said, 'Hell, let's go.' So we did."

My suspicions had not been so far off, then. Ted Kennedy! The principal lobbying support for the reform at that time came from organized labor—always eager to restrict the supply of unregulated labor.

I told Simpson that I had just met a senator who said to "hit him hard on employer sanctions." His demeanor remained calm, but something caught fire inside and burned briefly. "Well, I've been called everything," he said, his tone quiet and even and measured. "I've been through the fires of bigotry and racism and all that crap. I used to say, 'Don't quote to me from the Statue of Liberty.' It doesn't say on the base, Emma Lazarus said send us everybody you've got, legally or illegally. Employer sanctions are the guts of any kind of reform. The law before was that it was legal to hire an illegal, but illegal for the illegal to work. Now if that isn't the ultimate stupidity for a constitutional government . . ."

The only thing wrong with the law at present is that "maybe 40 percent of the documents presented to employers are fraudulent," he said. Producing fake ID has become "a cottage industry," so this session the Congress will take up a new national ID card, to be used "at the time of new hire." Under present law, amazingly enough, it is actually illegal for employers to ask prospective employees to produce green cards, or any other specific document, as proof of legality. This is thought to be discriminatory. The employer must fill out a form attesting that the employee is authorized to work, but is not at fault if the documents that support such a claim are faked.

Simpson does believe, however, that the threshold for making Social Security contributions, currently \$50 a quarter, should be raised—perhaps to \$300.

*Tom Bethell is The American Spectator's Washington correspondent.*

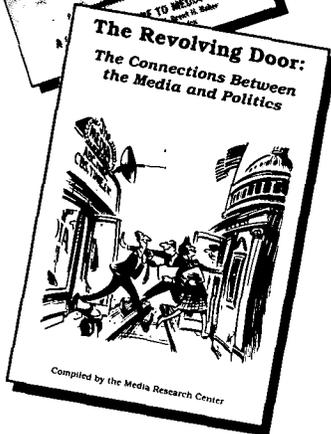
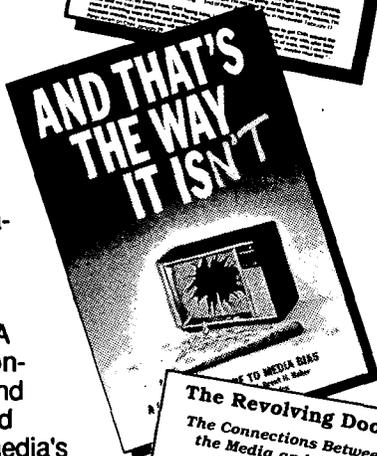
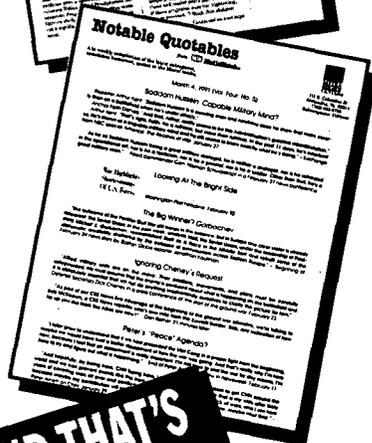
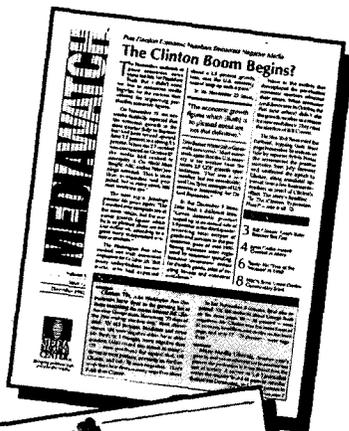
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"That should take care of the yard boy," he said. "I'm ready to do that."

In conversation, Simpson repeatedly gives one to understand that the Senate would be a better place if it wasn't for organized pressure from constituents. As a result, self-interest overrules statesmanship time and again. He favors term limits, for example, because "it would be a joy to know" that all those in their last term "would be a bedrock of doing things right, instead of doing them expediently." From a conservative perspective, of course, this is debatable. It's liberals who constantly seek to circumvent or obfuscate the popular will; hence their affection for the judiciary. Then again, Simpson is at least partly right. Reforming the entitlement culture on Capitol Hill cannot happen if legislators are intimidated by the organized lobbying of current beneficiaries threatened with cut-backs. Whatever else he may be, Simpson is not easily intimidated.

Here he is on the veterans' lobby: "There's 27 million veterans, but only three million of them ever heard a shell go past their heads, and the rest of them just howl. And there's no record of where they served; at least I went overseas [Germany in the fifties], which makes me a war hero compared to half of them. We should do everything we can for the combat veteran, the trainee accident, their widows, children. But for God's sake, a guy that served a year and never left Camp Beetle Bailey should not receive the same benefits that a combat veteran receives.

"No other country on earth does this," he continued. Speak out against the veterans' program, which now costs \$37 billion a year, or any number of other programs, and your opponent has a nice 30-second spot: "This is the slob that cut your veterans' benefit, this is the slob that cut your Social Security . . ."

Simpson was not optimistic about the prospects for Clinton's budget plan "because he still has not laid his scalpel on the sacred of sacreds, and that's these damned entitlements." Take Social Security. What we have to do, he said, is "compute how much you paid into this system, how much you make, what your net worth is, and if you're up there in that [upper-income] area we're going to cut you off. We'll cash you in, and you can have interest at the premium rate, but you're going to get out of this game because there's no way this system . . ."

Something else crossed his mind: "When I was a freshman in college there were sixteen people paying into the system and one taking out. Today there are three people paying in and one taking out." In twenty years it will be two to one. "How long do you think people will sit still to put in \$12,500 a year while some dud is taking out \$25,000?" He was cheered by the recent youth rally outside the AARP headquarters in Washington, with kids asking: "When are you guys going to quit being so selfish?" Great! "They don't quite know how to handle that," Simpson said with relish. At town meetings in Wyoming, he tells young people to "get active and get in the game." Simpson's prescription, however, would seem to turn Social Security into even more of an income-redistribution scheme than it already is. That is also the direction in which Social Security is headed under Team Billary.

Simpson seemed to admire Hillary's steeliness. "I think she's got the guts to do it," he said of her embryonic health-care reform. So, what needs to be done in that area? "You do something to doctors," he said, without specifying what, "you do something to hospitals, you do something to durable goods providers, and you do something with malpractice." (Sounds like price-controls.) If Clinton "fails" on health-care, Simpson asserted, he will fail overall. "All of this goodwill will just disappear and that will be the end of it."

He predicted that Democrats would call for a GOP alternative to their tax increase plan, and in responding to the put-up-or-shut-up call, Simpson veered unexpectedly into truly verboten territory: criticism of the holy of conservative holies—Ronald Reagan. "I'll say, pal, in May of '85, we all put up. We wheeled Pete Wilson in here on a gurney, and voted 50-49 to get rid of thirteen agencies of government and freeze the whole damned operation including Social Security, veterans' benefits, military retirement." Ten days later came the downer. Reagan—Ronald Reagan!—"said we must do it differently. He didn't go for the package. I called him and he said, 'I just couldn't do that to the poorest people on Social Security.' I said, 'It [COLA freeze] was only for a year. You could have left the thirteen agencies cut.' He said, 'I just couldn't . . .'"

Truly, Ronald Reagan, who so often said he admired Roosevelt, was closer to him than conservatives want to admit. "It was all out of compassion," Simpson added, trying to soften the blow. But it's time someone said what Simpson said. Federal spending ran way ahead of revenues in the 1980s primarily because Reagan himself didn't really want to rein it in. Once they realized what a pliant figure Reagan was, liberals kept mum. In fact, they kept up the smokescreen about how anti-government he was. Reagan helped by giving his anti-government speeches. Thus the impression was created that government spending is truly uncontrollable. ("If Reagan couldn't control it, who could?") In the end, then, deficits could only be cured one way. Now the Game Show Host has taken to the stage with the liberals' dream package of tax increases.

Simpson didn't tell me this, but my guess is that he thinks the Republicans blew it when, for six years, they controlled the White House and the Senate. They let spending run out of control, not because they didn't have the votes to stop it, but because they didn't have the courage.

A few years back I criticized Simpson on the immigration issue (*TAS*, February 1986), and he wrote back complaining that I hadn't even contacted his office for comment (*TAS*, April 1986), which was true. My excuse was that you go up to Capitol Hill, talk to these guys, and before you know it you're friends and you don't feel like criticizing them anymore. Since then, Simpson and I have been vaguely talking lunch. It seems that Simpson and Nina Totenberg made up, too. "She called me in January 1992," Simpson recalled, and said, 'You and I have been through some heavy fire. Do you want to go to the White House Correspondents Dinner with me?' And I said sure. So we went."

He says now of her earlier attack on him: "I liked her spirit. She had good energy." Well, Senator Simpson has a lot of spirit, too. Combining charm and asperity, he has managed to cast himself in an unusual Washington role: the impolitic pol—an acerbic variation on Sam Ervin's "country lawyer." I liked him, I really did. I doubt if I will criticize him again—except on employer sanctions. □

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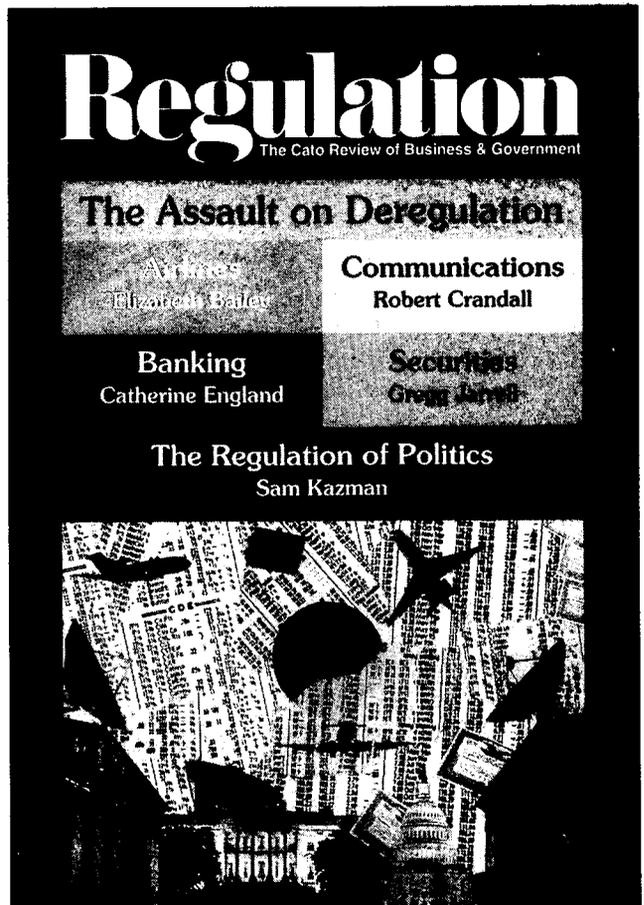
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# Emily's List: Chicks With Checks

*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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