

improve his support among female voters, notably those in the suburbs. One way is to install women in highly visible positions. And one place where women are especially prominent is public affairs jobs, speaking on behalf of cabinet secretaries. At two of the most prestigious departments, women run the public affairs shops—Mindy Tucker at Justice, Michelle Davis at Treasury.

At the White House, 8 of the 18 participants in the daily senior staff meeting are women, undoubtedly a record. Karen Hughes, one of Bush's most trusted advisers, oversees the speechwriting staff. Condoleezza Rice is the first woman to serve as national security adviser. Mary Matalin is Vice President Cheney's top political aide. Despite the ascendancy of women, the Bush administration has gotten zero credit from feminist groups. "Are you kidding?" Matalin says, arguing that these groups cheer only if pro-choice liberal women gain senior positions.

But there is a political downside. Bush, like most Republicans, says he rejects quotas and preferences. But he has adopted the fallback position—diversity—of those who do support setting aside jobs or promotions or other benefits for women and minorities. Colleges such as the University of Michigan give preference in admission to minorities, citing the need for diversity in the student body. They claim they don't use quotas, but the results are similar. This—quotas by another name—may be true in the Bush administration as well, making Bush look like a hypocrite.

Many of Bush's female nominees are both experienced and talented. Victoria Clarke was press secretary to Senator John McCain, worked with Matalin in the 1992 reelection campaign of the first President Bush, ran PR for the National Cable Television Association, and more recently has headed the Washington office of Hill and Knowlton, the respected public relations firm. No doubt she's qualified to be spokeswoman for many federal agencies. The problem is the Defense Department may not be one of them. ♦

The Streisand Democrats

People who need soft money are the unluckiest people in the world. **BY MIKE MURPHY**

SOMEWHERE ON CAPITOL HILL a group of long-faced Democrats are having an unhappy meeting about the cost of giving up huge soft money donations to the Democratic party. But there is a bright spot: A voice from the back of the room pipes up, "Well, at least this means I can finally ignore those damn fruitcake memos I keep getting from Barbra Streisand." Heads nod all round.

Barbra is at it again. Last week the Capitol Hill newspaper *Roll Call* published a "memo" Ms. Streisand recently sent to every Democrat in Congress. It is an astonishing mix of New Age boosterism and Old Left know-nothingism, blended into a

flaky litany of insults directed at George W. Bush. Entitled "Nice Guys Finish Last"—this is, after all, advice from Hollywood—Ms. Streisand's

opus brings to light the dreariest side of Democratic soft money: the gruesome requirement to suffer rich fools, no matter how chowder-headed their opinions.

Barbra Streisand is a champion fund-raiser for the Democratic party. Since 1993, she has personally contributed more than \$200,000 to Democratic candidates, and her relentless tin cup

banging and concert giving have helped the Democrats raise more than \$51 million from Hollywood.

Democrats return the golden favor by indulging her ego and keeping a straight face while Barbra blurts out her opinions. The same week as the



The Streisand letter

Mike Murphy is a GOP media consultant.

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Streisand Grand Strategy was leaked—no doubt by a chortling Hill aide—the *Washington Post* reports that Streisand “held a top-secret strategy session with House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, actor Warren Beatty, producer Norman Lear and billionaire entertainment mogul Haim Saban at her Southern California estate,” meeting later with Democratic National Committee boss and moneyman Terry McAuliffe.

Another Reykjavik to be sure. One can imagine the scene: the most powerful Democrat in Congress nodding agreeably throughout the lecture while stealing secret glances at his watch and wondering if it will be steak or chicken on the long flight back to D.C. Perhaps Barbra’s psychic nutritionist had a few good ideas to share about reforming Medicare.

If the meeting was anything like Streisand’s memo, then Gephardt surely earned his bagful of money. Barbra’s Big Idea? Congressional Democrats need to stop being such squares and scaredy cats and start telling the REAL STORY about the election: a vast—you got it—right-wing corporate conspiracy hatched by the bought-and-paid-for Supreme Court to steal the election and ruthlessly “roll back more than thirty years of social progress.” In Barbra’s view, it was all a “*Supreme Coup*” (the emphasis is hers, to be certain the dim bulbs in Congress get it).

The obvious path to unlimited success, according to Streisand? Remind people about Bill Clinton. Stop pussyfooting around the pardon thing. “Clinton’s pardons have no impact on the health and welfare of the American People.”

Streisand even exhumes a moldy old liberal crowd-pleaser about Ronald Reagan. Nobody ever supported Reagan *on the issues*; no, never that. Instead the dunce-filled American public only supported him because they admired his strength and sense of purpose. And oh-my-God, it’s happening again, warns Streisand: “Unfortunately the public is being fooled

by Bush.

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Barbra Streisand

not sufficiently informed to protect their own self interests.” It’s quite a bummer. “Look at his ratings—how could such a destructive man be so popular with the American people?” While refraining from a call for an all-knowing leadership apparat of the proletariat, Barbra does remind Democrats that “the public responds to strength.” She concludes with, “Just being nice doesn’t work.”

The right to spout off crank opinions from every barstool, cab window, and Hollywood mansion is as American as apple pie. What is amazing is the get-out-of-jail-free pass Hollywood blowhards get from the media. No lefty pop culture titan is ever held accountable for inaccurate, insulting, or just plain nitwitted commentary. Instead, mouthy celebrities are indulged like precocious but gifted children. “Isn’t that cute? Barbra thinks the President of the United States ‘stole the presidency’ through ‘intimidation’ and ‘fraud’ because sinister corporate interests bought the election! And the Supreme Court is corrupt!”

Woe unto thoughtful and legitimate liberal Hollywood activists like Rob Reiner and the Creative Coalition’s William Baldwin. Celebrities who call names and make up facts are treated just like those who study the issues and propose serious ideas. To a lazy media, there is no difference.

Conservatives should get from Streisand’s memo what I am sure most Democratic politicians did—a good horselaugh. Our side is lucky. We don’t have to listen to this gibberish, pretend to respect it, and wonder how much more such yammering we will have to sit through while we wait for the big checkbook to open. ♦

Illustration by Drew Friedman