

Lily Herman Of ‘Get Her Elected’ Is Taking On The Senate

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Politics is unequal. That’s been clear for, well, ever. But 242 years after that original Independence Day and we’ve still never had a woman-identifying president. Women make up [less than 20 percent](#) of Congress. There are currently only six woman governors, and just over one-fourth of state legislators are women. So the work Lily Herman is doing is nothing short of radical: she is, in an era in which politicians [blatantly avoid passing sexual harassment legislation](#) and [brag about assaulting women](#), working to get women-identifying candidates elected at all levels of government across the entire country.

Get Her Elected is a volunteer network of about 2,200 people—though that number will likely continue to increase—from all fifty states working on short-term skills-based projects for over two-hundred progressive women-identifying candidates. Every week, Herman sends out an email (a long email) with a list of candidates and the tasks they’re looking for help with. The work ranges from data entry to web design to campaign finance consulting. The candidates, eager and excited and probably more than a little nervous, are up for school board, state senate, Congress, and everywhere in between. Volunteers send a quick email to Herman with their work samples, and candidates pick the best matches.

It’s not the kind of thing that seems shocking or particularly risky when you think about it. Building a grassroots OkCupid for politicians and volunteers is logical, particularly as remote work becomes more and more prevalent. The only reaction that’s really appropriate, then, when you hear of the work GHE does is: “How didn’t this exist before?”

There are organizations doing other things to get more women into office. EMILY’s List, for example, is a fundraising superpower, getting [nearly \\$27 million in contributions for women candidates](#) in the first six months of 2016 alone. And it, in the wake of the 2016 presidential election, is [expanding its candidate training program](#) to accommodate more of the thousands of women who felt the call to action watching Hillary Clinton give her concession speech. And, of course, there are many grassroots organizations working to advance women’s rights all over the planet. But, as Herman says, the skills-based volunteer network, which gives candidates access to knowledge they need immediately, is “a part of the pipeline that no one [was] really owning.”

This all makes Get Her Elected’s origin story all the more serendipitous.

Herman is a journalist (you may be familiar with her feminist and political writing at [Teen Vogue](#), [Refinery29](#), or [Allure](#), or her networking newsletter (Net)Work B*tch; you may have also heard of The Prospect, a college access organization, which started as a blog, she co-founded and for which, in 2015, she was named one of *Glamour’s* Top 10 College Women) from Jacksonville, county seat of Duval in northeastern Florida which went Trump in 2016 and Romney in 2012. In the months after Trump’s election, Herman, who now lives in New York City, spent a lot of time thinking about how she could help Democrats in historically red communities without flying back to her hometown.

Having previously volunteered and worked for political campaigns, she knew that there was a gap in resources for candidates coming from outside of the traditional channels: “Organizations sprouted up for years and years inspiring women to run,” she says. “But as soon as they enter the race, they’re left to fend themselves.” The candidates, who have passion and strong connections to their communities, are shut out of the career-politician knowledge base, putting them at an extreme disadvantage in competitive races. “Now, so many women are interested in running for office,” Herman says—but they have very limited resources.

So, she decided to ask if she had any connections who would help make up a volunteer network. “I put out a Tweet of interest because I didn’t find any resources,” she says. She asked, “Is there anyone out there who wants to offer their skills?”

“I got eighty responses in the first twenty-four hours.”

Knowing that her instincts were right, and that there was a clear “niche to be filled,” Herman got going. She and her thousands of volunteers have been working with candidates non-stop, executing 2017 and 2018 campaigns and preparing for the next round, and the rounds after that. Some candidates Get Her Elected has worked with only once, while others work with the network every other week. As a result, Herman’s schedule has been packed, to put it mildly. She’s been running Get Her Elected largely alone, with some people volunteering their time when she needs help. “My schedule changes every month or two,” she says, so she says she’s learned to be easier on herself, and to think critically about “what is and is not urgent.”

Such is the life of managing a startup while balancing other jobs—an extreme level of “busy” that Herman is at this point quite familiar with, having managed The Prospect throughout her undergraduate career. Her workload has been eased by smooth growth, which is itself the product of meticulous market research. It’s important, she says, to “do the research to see what’s out there and what’s not out there. Do due diligence before you jump in.” She spent several months trying to figure out what resources were already available and what she could contribute to the field before starting Get Her Elected. This was intentional: “It’s hard to pivot,” she says.

This planning is paying off, with growth and success coming immediately. In the fourteen months since Herman’s initial Tweet, she has seen stellar success: “During the 2017 election,” she says, “we were helping in the short-term, and helped eleven [candidates]. We had four women who won in local races in red or conservative districts. All four unseated Republicans.” This is the kind of victory that should resonate with progressive women the country over. “You have to start on the small, community level,” Herman says.

This is all not to say that Herman has not faced her set of challenges. Working in a field that is known for exclusivity, secrets, and “tradition” means that there’s an obvious barrier, and one that has been the subject of commentary and criticism since 2016: “Being entrenched in politics you get this, ‘This is the way it’s always been done’ [attitude],” Herman says. There are often “people who have ideas about what candidates or staffers should look like. Volunteers get denied by other organizations for not being [part of the] establishment. But I can point out the obvious that the system isn’t working. [And] once you reach a critical mass, people have to pay attention to you.”

And pay attention they will: in Texas' recent primary election, thirty-five of the candidates running had worked with Get Her Elected's volunteers; thirty-two made it to the next round—an astounding 91 percent.

The next six months should be thrilling for Get Her Elected, as primary season ramps up and evolves into the general. There's the distinct possibility that the Democrats could take back the [House](#), and [women](#) may take a larger share of Congress. As for the future? Herman says she doesn't know how the organization will continue to evolve, but it will be sticking around. It has candidates lined up for 2019 and some potential candidates for 2020. There's one thing that's clear—Get Her Elected is filling a void, and helping more progressive women enter politics. For that reason alone, she says, “it's important for [us] to survive in the long-term.”