



## The Ladies' Man

Why is Senator Tom Harkin so relentless in battling for women? Maybe because he feels like one of the girls

**E**ighty-six percent of American women support government initiatives to improve equal-pay laws. Nearly half are pro-choice and support a tax credit for the full cost of child care. Female legislators from both sides of the aisle typically support these issues. But with only seventy-four of the 535 seats in Congress being warmed by women, our best ally in Washington comes in the unlikeliest package: Tom Harkin, a laconic coal miner's son who likes to buy his clothes at the discount store Syms.

The Iowa Democrat, who last November won reelection to a fourth term in the Senate, has long prided himself on battling for the little guy. And when Harkin arrived in the Capitol, he quickly discovered the little guy was often female. "Women were at the bottom of the heap and didn't have much of a voice here," he says.

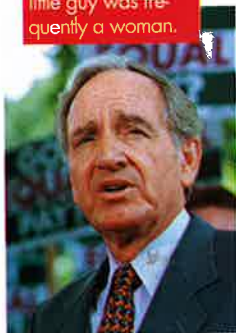
So what has he done about it? He co-sponsored the 1994 Violence Against Women Act, which created a Justice Department division to protect at-risk women. Then, he introduced the Fair Pay Act to close the salary gap between men and women working the same job. And the fight continues: In the 2003 session, he'll reintroduce into Congress the Safe Motherhood Act for Research and Treatment, to pump federal dollars into studying pregnancy complications.

Harkin's mind was opened early. His mother died when he was ten, leaving his father to raise the family. Harkin and his brothers cooked, cleaned, and did laundry alongside their sisters. "I never thought there was one role for women and one role for men," he says. (Impressed with his housekeeping skills, his Navy buddies dubbed him "Mother Harkin.") Then, in the '70s, both his sisters died of breast cancer; Harkin immersed himself in women's health issues. After discovering that medical research often didn't include

women, he pushed the National Institutes of Health to reverse this. He also fought to fund the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. "When I came to the Senate in 1986, I was one of only two women," says Maryland senator Barbara Mikulski. "Senator Harkin stood with us from the beginning. I call him our Galahad."

At sixty-three, Harkin is eligible for senior citizen discounts, but he appears unwilling to surrender his sword. "I'm not going to let up," he says. "We're going to really fight hard." —KATRINA WOZNICKI

**White knight:** Harkin (with Hillary Rodham Clinton, above) saw that the little guy was frequently a woman.



politics

## SCREEN GEMS

**S**tevie This portrait of an impoverished, abused kid turned emotionally impoverished, abusive adult is one of the most unobtrusively brilliant and harrowing documentaries ever made. Stevie Fielding is the sort of damaged goods our culture helps to create, then tries to throw away. While in college, director Steve James (*Hoop Dreams* and *Prefontaine*) was his Big Brother. Ten years later, he comes back into Stevie's troubled life not just to observe but also, somewhat guiltily, to help. Not for the fainthearted, but then, few documentaries this good are.

• **Spun** Amphetamines aren't just back on the street,

shortlist

movies



they're all over the movies. Despite vivid work by Jason Schwartzman, Brittany Murphy, John Leguizamo, and Mena Suvari, this hyperstylized tale of over-the-top tweakers by video director Jonas Akerlund ultimately OD's on its own hopped-up verisimilitude. To see speed freaks at play without getting your own headache, rent *The Salted Sea*.

• **Dark Blue** Kurt Russell gives his best performance in years as a harshly punitive LAPD homicide detective who finds himself caught in a web of police corruption. Scott Speedman is the rookie under Russell's wing, and gorgeous Michael Michele is Speedman's lover. Directed by Ron Shelton (*Bull Durham*), the movie goes cheesy just when it should get serious, but along the way delivers some breathtaking suspense.—K. D.



HARKIN: ROBERT TRIPPETT/SPSA