

Ms. Outsider is challenging Mr. Insider in Pennsylvania

By ELLEN GOODMAN

PITTSBURGH — Lynn Yeakel is standing in a living room in this beleaguered steel valley talking to a houseful of voters about jobs and health care, about Washington and Pennsylvania, about herself and her opponent.

She is in what she describes amusingly as her "ninth month" of public life. The official due date is Nov. 3. So she ends these remarks by repeating her slogan, asking these people to have "courage for a change."

It is just one year since Anita Hill faced a phalanx of white male senators in a hearing room. Just one year since Arlen Specter appeared as the Senate's chief inquisitor, cross-examining the law professor as if she were a perjurer.

The image of the Senators and the Professor, the Boy's Club and the Lone Woman fueled a new political activism all across this country. Here, in Specter's home state, it propelled Yeakel, founder and executive of a fund-raising organization called Women's Way, to take on the senator himself.

Now, of all the Senate races in the country, this one has become a classic. It's the *real* outsider versus the *real* insider. It's the pitfalls of inexperience up against the pitfalls of arrogance. And it's very much up for grabs.

Last May, when Yeakel won the Democratic primary with a videotape ad of Specter interrogating Hill, there were many who assumed it was all over. In the afterglow of her victory, with all the rosy hype about

The sharp differences make the race one of the most interesting political studies of '92.

The Year of the Woman, some assumed she would easily beat this veteran senator. Now in a tough race, she says, "The expectations set for me were totally unrealistic."

Gradually and predictably, The Year of the Woman became the year of individual women, each on her own turf, with her own strengths and weaknesses. Yeakel, a true political novice among the 11 women running for the Senate, slipped badly in the polls. She was unable to widen her appeal. Her momentum was halted by Specter's skillful ad campaign, and by a series of attacks, many unfair. More than a few times, Yeakel had to remember Sen. Barbara Mikulski's advice: "When you get up in the morning, put on an imaginary raincoat. Then, whatever gets thrown at you won't touch your skin."

By late September, the common wisdom had determined that neither Yeakel nor her campaign was ready for prime time. The common wisdom reported that Specter's tough, well-heeled and experienced campaign had simply overrun her.

But the debate last Saturday night stopped this talk of certain Specter victory. Yeakel showed what analysts invariably called "surprising"

strength, while Specter seemed often uneasy and defensive.

From now to November, the sharp differences in style and substance of these two candidates will make this one of the most interesting case studies of Politics '92.

In a year of supposed anti-incumbent feeling, Specter is running on seniority. He takes personal credit for every popular bill. He claims responsibility for nearly every street light in Pennsylvania and drops every prominent name but one: George Bush.

In a year of supposed passion for fresh faces, Yeakel is both applauded and faulted for political inexperience. Her speech is thoughtful and honest, but often halting and low key in public. For better and for worse, she doesn't sound or look "like a politician."

In a year too when women have a supposed advantage, Yeakel's newcomer candidacy is complicated by external and internal dialogues about women in politics. A conflict between how women should be and how politics is.

When publicly attacked for perhaps the first time in her life, for example, she mused, "One of the things people want me to do is to fight back more. I get this especially from men. Stop being so nice. Fight him! Hit him! On the other hand they want me to be perfect and not get into the mud."

Indeed, when asked how she likes running for office in her "ninth month," Yeakel pauses and grimaces. She talks about the intrinsic unfairness of politics and about the enormous gap between the qualities you need to campaign well and those you need to govern well.

"I cannot help thinking of what

Adlai Stevenson said once, 'Anyone who does what it takes to get elected, isn't fit to serve.' I think about that a lot." She also thinks a lot about values. More money will be spent on the Pennsylvania Senate race than she has raised in years at Women's Way for programs for women and children.

In the end, the outcome of this race may depend on money and even the presidential campaign. It will depend on how strongly each candidate plays out the assigned role of insider and outsider.

There is one thing after all that she

and Specter both agree on. "Arlen Specter," she says, "is the ultimate symbol of the system." He calls that system "seniority" and declares that it's good for Pennsylvania. She calls it "gridlock" and disastrous.

The Year of the Outsider? The Year of the Women as change agent? This is one place where the hype of '92 is being tested.

Ellen Goodman's syndicated column originates at the Boston Globe.