

NARAL Remarks
Washington, D.C.
January 22, 1999

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PRESERVATION

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Remarks at NARAL Anniversary Luncheon
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Thank you. I am honored to be here with all of you on NARAL's 30th anniversary -- to celebrate the voices you have raised, the battles you have waged, and the victories won on behalf of women around the world.

For 30 years, every step forward for women's reproductive health in America has had one thing in common: the leadership of the people in this room. So I wanted to come this afternoon for many reasons, but I want to start by thanking all of you for what you do every day for the rights and health of women and families. I want to thank my dear friend, Secretary Shalala, Nancy Rubin, former and present members of Congress, Lucky Roosevelt and Susie Gelman for your hard work. And I particularly want to thank someone else. I know that in her remarks, Kate spotlighted many of NARAL's countless achievements, but I happened to notice that she left one thing out. And that is that none of it would have been possible in these last years without her and her leadership. Whether speaking out in the halls of Congress or organizing in communities across America, no one understands the stakes more. No one has been more courageous, passionate and tireless in the battle to make sure that every child is wanted, to make sure every pregnancy is planned, to make sure that every woman is blessed with reproductive health and freedom. And Kate, we all want to thank you for what you've done every single day. Thank you very much.

I'm also very humbled and honored to join the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and all of you, in honoring the courageous life and work of Dr. Slepian. The President and I, the Vice President and Tipper had the opportunity to meet Lynne Slepian and her four sons in Buffalo the other day. I don't know how I could adequately express the feelings that the four of us had standing there and talking with Lynne. Marilyn Buckham, the director of the Buffalo clinic, was with her. And those four young men. I'm told that recently Lynne, in a conversation with a friend, said how astounded she was that countless people that she didn't know had offered to help her family. Her friend replied, "It's because so many people admired Bart's courage and commitment." "But you know," Lynne said, "he didn't do those things to be admired." And the friend replied, "We know. And that's one of the reasons we admired him so much."

For his work was not the work of politics. It was the work of a community physician who brought life into the world, and gave health and dignity to women. That was his mission, and it must be our enduring goal.

Because we are here not only to celebrate NARAL's 30th birthday, but also to commemorate the 26th anniversary of Roe v. Wade. We can all take heart that despite many attempts to chip away at its guarantees, Roe is still the law of the land. We can take heart that we have stopped the global gag rule, for now. That Title X family planning funding increased by \$12 million. And that federal

health plans are now required, if they cover prescription drugs, to also cover contraceptives.

But there is even more that happened this past year that we can celebrate. Because after years of moving in the wrong direction, we are finally seeing teen pregnancies and teen sexual activity going down. Unintended pregnancies are down. Abortions are down by a full 12 percent. And all of this happened under a pro-choice president who has refused to back down in his support of a woman's right to choose. A pro-choice president who respects the strongly held views of those who act in good faith, hold a different view. And who has worked to make good on the promise he made seven years ago to work to make abortion safe, legal and rare. Now you know better than anyone else that this will never be, it cannot be, an easy issue. It will always be hard. We don't have to look any further than the events on the Mall, the event in this room, and the gulf between them to know that emotions and feelings will always run deep.

But all too often, generally because of the loudest voices, the American people don't hear explained the efforts that we're engaged in to continue to work with people from all different walks of life to make abortion safe, legal, and rare. But instead they hear what Lawrence Tribe calls "The Clash of Absolutes." People shouting at each other about their differences instead of talking about and working to find what they have in common. That doesn't mean that anyone should ever abandon his or her belief that their fundamental convictions, and certainly, for those of us here, it means we never abandon our belief that the fundamental human right all people have to plan their own families. And it also means that we can never work with those who advocate violence. But there are people of good faith on all sides of this issue, and every day that we fail to find common ground to meet our goals of giving human rights and dignity to all people, another day goes by where a child is born unwanted, or a woman cannot get access to proper health care, or a teenager becomes pregnant and doesn't know what to do.

Across our country, we come to this issue as men and women, young and old, some far beyond years when we have to worry about getting pregnant, others too young to remember what it was like in the days before Roe v. Wade. People call themselves by different labels, follow different political philosophies or religions, but I think it's essential that as Americans we look for that common ground that we can all stand upon. For more than anything, our democracy is built upon a powerful idea: that people with profound differences and backgrounds can work together, across whatever divides them personally, in pursuit of common goals. Because, despite our differences, there are certain core beliefs and values that tie us together and set us apart as Americans. And it is those beliefs that can guide us in reaching our goal of keeping abortion safe, legal and rare into the next century.

I want to talk about three of those core, fundamental American beliefs. First, as Americans, most of us believe that the government should never be involved in the personal decision a woman makes about whether to bring a child into this world. I know that earlier you got a look at the new NARAL ad that will begin running Monday night. And I want to congratulate NARAL for calling choice what it is: a fundamental American value and freedom. So every time we hear calls from those who would do away with family planning or limit reproductive rights, I hope we remember

how fundamental our American values are to this debate. I also hope we will hear the voices of others who have come before us. Just imagine for a minute hearing the voices of the women who lined around the block for hours in 1916, waiting for Margaret Sanger to open the nation's first birth control clinic in Brooklyn. Before the police shut it down 10 days later, the clinic managed to help hundreds of women, and they all had their stories to tell. Stories of miscarriages and dangerous and illegal abortions, and the daily struggles to feed, clothe and shelter seven, eight, nine, ten or even more children when there was barely enough to care for one.

Of course we know too well the human history beyond our shores is replete with examples of inhumanity, and the abuse of power. So every time someone glibly says that we should have a constitutional amendment banning abortion or we should criminalize abortions, I hope we will listen to the voices of those who have been the victims of such practices. I hope we could hear the voices of the women who have suffered, often in silence, in Nazi Germany. For Aryan women, deemed "valuable," abortion facilities were prohibited, and their miscarriages were investigated by the police. For Jewish women, and Gypsy men and women in the concentration camps, they faced mass sterilizations as part of the quest to prevent "inferior" children. And from 1942 on, when women deported as forced labor became pregnant, their pregnancy was reported to a special S.S. officer, who tested them to identify their race, and then he decided the outcome of their pregnancy.

Every time someone tries to eliminate access to family planning, or further curtail reproductive rights, I hope we'll hear voices from women in Romania. When I visited there just a few years ago, I spoke with women about what it was like before they had democracy --when they were taken against their will, often, or just as it became a matter of course once a month during their working hours. Taken to a general holding facility where they were physically examined to determine if they were pregnant, stripping them of their dignity.

As part of Ceausescu's campaign to increase population in Romania to 30 million, birth control, sex education and abortions were outlawed. You could open the door of your home and find a member of the communist youth group there to quiz you about your private life to find out why you hadn't conceived yet. And if you failed to conceive, you were fined a celibacy tax of up to 10 percent of your monthly salary.

I hope we will also listen to the voices coming out of China. The voices of women today now include many who are working to ensure that their country's family planning practices are voluntary and respectful. When I was there, I heard about what the one-child policy had once meant for too many women.

Back in the early 1980s, your menstrual cycle and use of contraceptives could be monitored by local authorities. If you wanted to have a child, you needed to get permission or perhaps face punishment. And, after you'd had your one allotted child, you could be sterilized against your will or forced to have an abortion.

Which is why in my speech in Beijing, I said that "It is a violation of human rights when

women are denied the right to plan their own families --and that includes being forced to have an abortion or being sterilized against their will.”

I hope everyone who has ever talked about making abortion illegal or limiting access to family planning will listen to these voices from our own history and the history of other women around our world. More powerful than any statistic, they tell the story of two different extremes. The government saying you cannot have children --and the government saying you must have children. Neither of which is consistent with our American sense of fundamental justice, freedom and democracy.

That’s why NARAL is right to keep asking, Who decides? And the American people have been right to answer again and again: This difficult decision must be made by individual women, in privacy, in consultation with her conscience, her family, her doctor, her God – and not her member of Congress.

We also must continue to say that making abortion illegal only succeeds in doing one thing --making it unsafe, dangerous for women. As the Guttmacher Institute study released yesterday makes clear, even in some countries where abortion is illegal, they have abortion rates higher than what we have here in the United States. Because even when abortion is illegal, women who feel they need or have a right to the procedure find a way --but often at great risks to themselves. Every year around the world, almost 600,000 women die of pregnancy related causes --and 78,000 of these deaths are because of unsafe abortions.

Even in our country, we have seen what can happen when a small group of extremists tries to accomplish through violence and intimidation what they have been unable to achieve through the ballot box or the courts.

That brings me to the second principle that I hope continues to guide our country, and that is this: Violence, harassment, and intimidation have no role in our health care system or in this debate. Yes, we should respect each other’s First Amendment rights to express our views. But no one debases the values of free speech, life and religion more than terrorists who claim to be acting in their name.

At Dr. Slepian’s memorial, there were countless parents who came to honor him. And they did not come alone. In their arms or by their sides were the children that he had delivered, some of whose lives he had literally saved. They will be his lasting legacy.

But what can each of us do that would best honor his memory, and the memory of others who have been killed? We must honor them as Dr. Wortman has done, by refusing to back down in our efforts to make sure that doctors are trained and available to provide safe and comprehensive health care to women all over our nation.

And we can do everything in our power to prevent violence and terrorism before it

happens. In the last 10 years, there have been seven murders, 38 bombings, 146 cases of arson, and 733 cases of vandalism. Wherever one stands on the issue of abortion, surely we should all agree that when doctors are murdered, when clinics are bombed, splattered with acid, or set on fire, this is not free expression. This is domestic terrorism. And it must stop.

That's why I'm pleased to announce that the President's FY 2000 budget will include \$4.5 million to provide extra security to clinics at risk. And that means proper lighting, motion detectors, closed-circuit cameras, security systems, and bullet-resistant windows.

You know, we should recognize that nothing good can come from people preaching or practicing hate --whether they do it from a street corner or from a website. And no one has taught us this lesson better than the man whose birthday we celebrated this past Monday. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his speech about this topic 33 years ago said, "There is scarcely anything more tragic in life than a child who is not wanted." And that brings me to my third point.

More than anything, as Americans I think we can find common ground in the belief that all children should be wanted --and that indeed abortions should be rare.

I have met thousands and thousands of pro-choice men and women. I have never met anyone who is pro-abortion. Being pro-choice is not being pro-abortion. Being pro-choice is trusting the individual to make the right decision for herself and her family, and not entrusting that decision to anyone wearing the authority of government in any regard.

Now I think we can all agree that it is a tragedy when four in 10 pregnancies worldwide are unplanned --and half of them end in abortion. Now if we want, really, to reduce these numbers, we know we cannot achieve that goal by making abortions harder to get. We must do it by standing up for family planning here and around the world. And I am pleased to announce that the President's budget request for FY 2000 does just that.

He is asking for an increase of \$25 million in Title X Family Planning grants --the largest increase in 15 years --and is also asking for \$25 million for the United Nations Population Fund --thereby renewing our commitment to those women around the world who rely upon that fund for contraceptives, maternal care, and child care.

Now, I am always amazed --as I was during the debates on this issue last year --that those who oppose family planning try to link family planning to increases in abortion. Now we know that it is, on the contrary, by refusing to fund family planning programs that we force women to fall back on abortion.

We know that contraception reduces the probability of having an abortion by 85 percent. We know that every year, U.S. family planning programs prevent 1.2 million unintended pregnancies and 516,000 abortions in our country alone. And we have seen the same results the world over.

I am looking forward to my trip to the Hague in a little over, a little less, I guess now, than two weeks, where nations will gather in anticipation of Cairo plus five, to highlight success stories --and find ways of replicating them worldwide.

But I have already seen many of those success stories firsthand. As I have personally had the opportunity to visit health centers all over the world, where family planning is decreasing the abortion rate --and helping women gain authority and dignity in their own lives.

I remember visiting a maternity hospital in Brazil, where they had integrated family planning and reproductive health into their maternal and health services.

I saw mothers standing in the crowded hallways, cradling their newborns, waiting for well-baby appointments. Young women waiting for their prenatal appointments. Infants getting immunized. I saw parents getting the information they needed to make wise choices about planning their families. And I also saw wards of women who were there because they had not received quality health care. Many had, however, received self-induced or back-alley abortions.

I spoke to a number of mothers who told me that for the first time they could adequately care for the children they had. I learned about how rates of maternal mortality and abortion decreased because women received health care they needed in a timely fashion. And I fell in love with the Minister of Health for the state I was visiting when he said what everyone knows, and that is he intended to bring to poor women the same access to family planning services that well-to-do women take for granted.

It was indeed a victory when contraceptives were included last year in health plans for federal employees. But now, private plans should cover contraceptives as well. It is also past time to pass a Patient's Bill of Rights so that women will not have to go through a gatekeeper to see their OB/GYN every year. And it is time, through our community health clinics and other facilities, to give all people access to effective family planning and, I hope someday, universal health care.

And, if we want to decrease unintended pregnancies, abortions, welfare, and the number of young people dropping out of school, we must continue the progress we have made on preventing teen pregnancy. I am very pleased with the results of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, headed by Sarah Brown and enlisting many distinguished Americans. That campaign has made teen pregnancy an issue on the front covers of teen magazines and soap operas, and has used many imaginative ways of reaching out with many Americans, particularly young Americans, as possible. And we've got some success to show for this effort.

Fewer teens are having sex, getting pregnant, and having abortions, so we are getting the word out, but there are clearly too many young people who have not yet gotten this message. I'm always stunned when I meet with groups of young women who have babies already, who are pregnant and perhaps attending a class I visit. They sit there with a totally straight face and tell me that as soon as their boyfriend gets a job or gets back from the Army, or gets out of jail, they'll be

a family, and everything will work out just fine. Well, we know better, and we have to continue to educate our young women about that reality as well.

But we know that young women get pregnant for a whole host of reasons. Some just don't understand why it's a bad idea, because they will, they think, have someone who is totally there who will love them unconditionally, at least until that child becomes a toddler and learns to say no. But that's another story. Some are coerced by older boyfriends. Some are the victims of incest. Others can't cope with school or their family and see pregnancy and motherhood as a way out. Whatever the reason might be, we have to try to reach every single teenager. We're doing that in a variety of ways. We are leaving no strategy unused. The pregnancy prevention programs include abstinence education, more after-school programs, efforts like Secretary Shalala's Girl Power Campaign, access to family planning, decision-making groups --any approach that we think can work.

And we are seeing that this multi-pronged strategy can give us positive results. For example, back in 1990, Cortland, New York, had one of the highest teen pregnancy rates around. The county's family planning clinic and Catholic Charities decided to work together. They made the clinic free. They enlisted teens to talk to teens. They created a place for youngsters to go every Saturday night with adult supervision. They brought in religious leaders and businesses and they taught parents how to talk to their own children. And they set a goal of reducing the teenage pregnancy rate by one-third by the year 2000. Today they have almost reached that goal. As of 1996, the rates had decreased 30 percent --the lowest in that community in 20 years.

So we know what works. We have to muster the will and build the coalitions that reach out and include all members of a community in making it possible for not only young people, but people of any age, to have access to the services, to be given the support they need to make wise decisions about their sexual life so that they can prevent pregnancy and prevent abortion.

I remember hearing about a conversation that Sarah Brown had with a teen father in Los Angeles. As they talked about what he felt like, being a father at such a young age, at the end of the conversation, he told Sarah that, "No adult had ever taken that much interest in what happened to me."

Well, the truth is that we have to pay attention to young women and young men, we have to do what we can to make it possible that they can have the equipment they need --psychologically, emotionally --to withstand pressure and to make the right decisions.

One young person from Texas, when asked what parents could do to prevent their own children from becoming pregnant said: "Don't leave us alone so much." Now, as any parent of teenagers knows, I don't think he meant literally he wanted to spend every second with his parents. But I do think that he was sending us in the adult community a very important message: that we have to fill our young people's lives with meaningful activities, skills they can obtain, a good education and just plain old-fashioned support and love. If we give them something else in their lives to look forward to --playing on a soccer team, being in a school play, or going to college, becoming a

teacher, whatever it might be --then the needs that they sometimes feel to achieve maturity early will have some tough competition.

A number of years ago, at the Baltimore Self Center, Rosalie Strett used to give pregnant girls baby dolls to teach them to be parents. But she replaced the face of the doll with a mirror --not only so they would learn to make eye contact with their children, but so that when they looked down, they would see themselves, and that child, in the future.

Imagine if every person looked into the mirror before sexual activity, before a pregnancy, and asked, "Am I ready for this?" Imagine if boys and men --not just girls and women --looked into that mirror as well. Because we have to do more to reach out to young men, and enlist them in the campaign to make abortion rare, and to make it possible for them also to define their lives in terms other than what they imagine sexual prowess and fatherhood being.

All of us --citizens, parents, teachers, government officials, the media, sports figures, religious leaders, business leaders --all of us need to look in that mirror. We have to make it our responsibility to create a new ethic of planned parenthood in this country. An ethic where people have the tools they need to plan every pregnancy --probably, by any measurement, the most important event in their lives --with as much care and detail as they plan other major events.

I hope we will do more than imagine. I think again of Dr. Slepian, who despite the harassment, had the courage every day to be there for the women who relied upon him.

I think of the women who died in back-alley abortions. The women forced to bear children in Romania or forced to abort them in China. And I think of the pioneers in our own country before Roe v. Wade --some in this room --who, even when you were ridiculed, threatened or ostracized, stood up for the right of each woman to choose. You have led us to this day, and we are grateful for your leadership. But now we have to expand far beyond this room, and far beyond those who are already identified an understanding that the issue we are proposing --the pro-choice issue --is an issue with deep roots in American democracy and human rights.

I hope that at the 50th anniversary of NARAL, the people on this podium speaking to you and the people in the audience will be able to say that we persevered. We did not turn our backs on our fundamental principles, but we also faced forward. That we worked with those who were willing to work with us to end some of the divisiveness that has plagued this issue. And we found the courage --and the common ground --to make it possible for future generations to say that abortion is safe, legal and indeed, rare.

At some point in that future, where we will be able, I hope, to have built a much stronger foundation, and created on much more common ground, we will not have to hear these endless debates about family planning, about reproductive rights, but instead, we will all be focused on giving to each person in our country the respect that person needs to make the decisions all of our lives that only we can and should make. That's the kind of America that we celebrate today. That's

the kind of America we must continue to fight for. Thank you all very much.