

9-15-00
Planned Parenthood

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
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CHAMPIONS OF CHOICE ANNUAL LUNCHEON
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Good afternoon. I am honored to join Jatrice Martel Gaiter [Ja-Treese Mar-Tel Gay-tor], Susan Haas Bralove [Bray-Love], Katherine Graham, and all of PPMW's staff and supporters for your Champions of Choice luncheon. I want to congratulate the award winners -- Dr. Carhart [Car-heart], Olie Rauh [Oh-lee Row], and Brenda Rhodes Miller -- who have worked tirelessly to guarantee women's health and women's rights. And I want to thank each of you gathered there today, for bringing health and hope to so many people in the metropolitan area who have no where else to turn.

It is in large part because of your efforts that so much progress has been made. Over the last eight years, family planning funding has gone up. Abortions and teen pregnancies have gone down. And all of this happened under a pro-choice President who has never backed down in his support of a woman's right to choose. But, as you know better than anyone, these rights are far from secure.

As I have traveled around the world, I have seen what happens when governments force women to bear children, as they did in Romania, or dictate childbearing choices, as happened in China. And, of course, so many of us remember the dark days before Roe, when women in this country suffered and died because of illegal and unsafe abortions.

We cannot allow extremists to turn back the clock. We must keep working until the day when clinics are no longer bombed and burned, and their doctors are no longer threatened and even killed. We must keep working until the day when every woman has access to family planning and freedom of choice. When every child is wanted and supported. And yes, when abortion is safe, legal, and rare. The fundamental choice about whether to bring a child into the world should be made by a woman -- in consultation with her doctor, her family, and her God -- not her member of Congress.

A few years back, I was touring a health clinic in Brazil, where women were receiving reproductive care, often for the very first time. And the Minister of Health there said something to me that I will never forget. He said "rich women will always have access to family planning. We need to make sure poor women do as well."

That has always been the mission of PPMW. In the face of great opposition and even danger, you have never given up on the men, women, and young people you serve. And so, I want to thank the award recipients and all of you for your courage and commitment. Thank you for being champions of choice. Thank you for all you have done -- and all you will do -- to improve the health, lives, and futures of people throughout the Metropolitan area. I wish all of you God speed in your important work in the days and years ahead.