

**Planned Parenthood of
Columbia/ Willamette
January 29, 2009**

When I was honored by the invitation to speak at this event, I recalled the story that Winston Churchill once used to his advantage; the possibility of a second invitation from George Bernard Shaw to one of his opening plays. Shaw's note read: "Enclosed are two tickets to the first-night performance of a play of mine. Bring a friend - if you have one." Not to be out done, Churchill shot back this reply: "Dear G.B.S., I thank you very much for the invitation and the tickets. Unfortunately, I am engaged on that night, but could I have two tickets for the second performance – if there is one?" I'm very grateful for the opportunity to make a second appearance at Planned Parenthood of Columbia & Willamette.

Famous philosopher, and former New York Yankee great, Yogi Berra once said, "It's difficult to make predictions, especially about the future."

One fact that we know from the past, is that volunteer citizenship is rooted deep in our democratic values. And for the future, Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society, but the people themselves: the people shouldering responsibility for each other and for their communities – speaking out on issues that effect them, preserving the freedoms that we cherish..." This is the reason we celebrate, today: the freedom of choice we cherish. And, for these reasons, and more, the voluntary sector—you— has had an exceptional impact on America; an impact without parallel in any other nation.

Voluntary organizations, such as Planned Parenthood of Columbia & Willamette, have supplied American society, with precious commodities: the power to create change, not just for the problems as they exist, but to change the conditions, for the future, in which we will live our lives and leave to future generations. Moved by a combination of compassion for the unfortunate and a passion for justice, volunteers have driven social progress on an extraordinary number of fronts.

Women's rights grew from anti-slavery women's societies. Women prominent in the abolition movement began engaging in political activity for their causes. Women like Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Sojourner Truth, called a meeting after the Emancipation Proclamation to start the movement for full citizenship for women and to consider what they called the solemn lessons of the war: "National protection for every citizen under our flag. Universal suffrage and universal amnesty." Lobbying, petitioning, public speaking and, yes, civil disobedience.

Margaret Sanger, jailed for leafleting, said, "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother."

I learned the power of commitment from my mother's fundamentalist revival sermons... The power to change thinking, to change attitudes, to change behavior, to change lives. My mother preached night after night—in cities throughout the country. Sometimes I could not judge where she ended and God began, but, I wanted to change.

The power of her words and to confess my sins and be saved from hell's brimstones, ejected me off the bench. I rushed to the altar, night after night, to be saved. It never quite took.

The best indicator of the well being of a nation, is the health of its people. In the exhilaration of our current political climate, we must not lose sight of persisting human needs. Health care is not recognized as a fundamental human right. The great divides of race, socio-economic status, and gender remain barriers to equitable health care. They are the same obstacles that afflict other aspects of our society. This is the moment of great opportunity, for progress for women and, thereby, the elevation of our whole society.

Where might we see the evidence for change? Death rates from cancer have been declining since 1990. However, men have benefited more from those declines, than have women. Though breast cancer accounts for the greatest number of newly diagnosed cancer, less than 16% of older black and Hispanic women get their yearly recommended mammogram. And lung cancer, not breast cancer, is the leading cause of women's cancer deaths. Among African-American women, breast cancer remains the #1 cause, of cancer deaths.

Heart disease accounts for approximately 45% of deaths, among women; in men, it's 40%. A study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that doctors were 40% less likely to order sophisticated cardiac tests for women who complained about chest pain, than for men with identical symptoms.

The spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, has reached epidemic proportions. The stakes are high. The stakes are deadly. Although men and women of all ages, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and income levels acquire STIs, women, teenagers, the poor, [and some minority groups,] especially African Americans, bear the

brunt of this epidemic. The spread of AIDS is now growing more rapidly among women than men. African Americans are nine times more likely to die from AIDS.

Violence against women is an urgent public health epidemic. In “Progress and Perils,” a landmark study of 3,300 women released, by the Center for the Advancement of Women in 2002, 92% of women cited violence against women as the number one priority for a new women’s movement. Domestic violence rates are 5 times higher among families below the poverty line. Nevertheless, a Commonwealth survey found that one-third of all women have been kicked, hit, punched, choked, or otherwise physically abused by a spouse or partner. Digital abuse is emerging as powerful weapon to stalk, harass and threaten the psychological and physical security of women. Domestic violence is a significant and frequently hidden contributor to poor health and mental illness in women...low birth-weight babies, injury and death of the fetus. Violence against women must be recognized and addressed in the same way as other behaviors that have serious health and economic consequences.

How can it be in our nation, that prides itself on being among the most technologically advanced, allow more than 40 million at any given time, this year, to live without health insurance coverage? If it were not for Medicaid/Medicare, 9 million more Americans, would be without health insurance coverage.

Almost all American women think men and women should be treated the same with respect to:

Employment, (94%);

Access to bank loans and credit, (98%);

Opportunities for promotion,

And pay raises (98%)

And education (99%).

Nevertheless, we have not fully realized the aspirations which we claim to believe in and the hopes of policies of affirmative action and the aspirations which we claim to believe in. This vision can only be possible in a workplace that guarantees equal opportunity.

70% of adult women are in the workforce, 60% of working women are concentrated in low-paying, service, clerical or sales jobs. Wage discrimination will start early in your career. According to the American Association of University Women research, 1 year after graduation, women are paid 20% less than their male colleagues in the same year.

Women will not close the gap over the life of their careers. Women can expect smaller raises, biased performance reviews, and fewer promotions and decision making positions.

On this issue, President Obama will send a strong message that it is unacceptable to continue the unjust practice of pay discrimination, by making the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which was approved by Congress Tuesday, the first bill he signed of his administration.

Gender politics is at its most flagrantly destructive in the persisting attacks on women's sexual and reproductive lives. What progress did we make during the Twentieth Century? What is at stake today? What could be lost?

Early 1900's

- Awakening to the injustice of forced motherhood,
- Birth control methods distributed, illegally

- The pill invented— opening new sexual and reproductive frontiers— separating contraception from sexual intimacy.
- 1965 Griswold v. Connecticut (and other court decisions) established the right of privacy for married couples
- The protection of the constitution over reproductive choice.
- Federal funding for family planning equalizing access to birth control for low income women
- Roe v Wade – Completed legal revolution; court recognized the constitutional right to abortion
- Medicaid funded abortion; Supreme Court upheld Congressional roll-back.
- Continuing advancement of contraceptive technology and access to services

In spite of these gains, America continues the dubious distinction of leading the developed world in unintended pregnancies among all women.

The erosion of reproductive rights is indisputable. Roe v. Wade no longer exists, as ruled by the Supreme Court, more than a generation ago. Gonzales vs. Carhart, Supreme Court turned its back on more than 30 years of precedents by allowing states to ignore a woman's health in prohibiting a method of late term abortion.

Reproductive control is vital to a woman's ability to forge a dignified and economically secure life. Pres. Obama: "We are united in our determination to prevent unintended pregnancies, reduce the need for abortion, and support women and families in the choices they make. To accomplish these goals, we must work to find common ground to expand

access to affordable contraception, accurate health information, and preventative services."

This common sense call reframed the widely accepted Clinton mantra to keep abortion "safe, legal and rare." Mr. Obama rightfully called for policies that go to the heart of the issue: prevention. Shifting the focus to creating values, conditions in which unintended pregnancy is rare, through accurate health information, and affordable contraception. In this framing, abortions remain safe and legal; the experience of an unwanted pregnancy becomes as uncomfortable as many find abortion to be. Yesterday, easier access to contraceptive services was removed from the Economic Stimulus bill, even though the Congressional Budget Office concluded it would have saved \$100 billion per year in government services resulting from unintended pregnancies.

A president who begins his term securing reproductive control and fair employment for women is a president who advances another step toward achieving women's true equality.

Social change cannot be conducted without the discomfort of disturbing the status quo. The battles for change are not finished. The rules by which we live are not made in a vacuum, policy is shaped and advanced by the force of public opinion. Influencing public opinion, and practices, is a long and arduous process. Clarity, consistency, repetition and endurance are required.

My religious upbringing and professional training, shaped my passion and ideals. In my mother's case, it was the passion of her message and the ideal of caring for others as the ticket to a heavenly hereafter.

For me, it was to become a missionary nurse. Becoming a nurse was a seminal turn in my life. It opened my vision to a world that was not my own. My patients did not need my judgment, they needed my compassion and my non-judgmental professional care.

At 33, I was the youngest appointed president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America. As I look back, the organization took a great risk. I learned a lot about the deep veins of sexual hypocrisy, intolerance, and lack of trust in women's power to decide the best course of their reproductive lives.:

- The Hatch-Denton hearings revealed how far we have to go to create lasting social change.

- Closed because of pornographic literature to be discussed.

Mostly, I learned that social progress cannot be made without evidence, vision, visibility, the courage to stand alone, if necessary, in the determination never to give in or to give up.

The political winds have turned favorable to regaining lost ground and making progress on many issues; while it is a moment of great pride in our country, our mission is not accomplished. There is much work to be done to restore protection of women's health and to build an international campaign and determined movement, to assure that censorship against women in developing countries is never tolerated, to make unintended pregnancy a rare experience.

Let us envision the prospects of a country that will continue to move forward on a progressive agenda. Let us use the public pulpit to assure that Americans understand what is at stake—the fundamental principles of:

- Dignity
- Fairness
- Equality
- Personal liberty.

“A reasonable person adapts himself to the world. The unreasonable one persists to adapt the world to himself or herself. Therefore, all progress depends upon the unreasonable person.” – George Bernard Shaw

Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizen scan change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”