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The Beginning of the Second Wave of the Women's Movement and Where We Are Today: a Personal Account

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The Beginning of the Second Wave of the Women's Movement and Where We Are Today: A Personal Account

Good Afternoon.

I had never seen a college or university in my life--until I came to Cornell to begin my freshman year at the undergraduate school over 62 years ago. I came here from Monticello, a small town in the Catskill Mountains of New York State--and since my graduation, it has always been a thrill to return. I am indebted to Professor Cynthia Bowman of the Law School for arranging this trip and to Karen Weiss, Director of Cornell's Southeast U.S. Regional Alumni Office, for all she has done to make this trip so meaningful and for being here with me today.

On January 22, 1969, about 40 years ago, a 4-day conference on the American woman began at Cornell, which was attended by over 300 women and a few men. One of the speakers, Political Scientist Andrew Hacker, stated that most women wouldn't fight for their rights because they didn't have the backbone. We know now he was wrong.

I date the start of the legal revolution in women's rights in this country to December 1961. On that date, President Kennedy established the President's Commission on the Status of Women, with Eleanor Roosevelt as chair, to review, and make recommendations for improving, the status of women. In 1963, that Commission issued its report called *American Women*, which reviewed the status of women in this country and made recommendations for improving it. On November 1 of that year, three weeks before his assassination, President Kennedy signed an executive order establishing the Interdepartmental Committee on the Status of Women and The Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women to facilitate carrying out the recommendations of the President's Commission.

Nineteen Sixty-Three was also the year when Congress passed The Equal Pay Act, which became effective in 1964. That law requires equal pay for equal or substantially equal work without regard to sex.

In 1964, Congress passed another Act, Title VII of The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which took effect on July 2nd, 1965, and was enforced by The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Originally, that law prohibited only discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin by employers, labor unions and employment agencies. Later, age discrimination and discrimination against persons with physical or mental disabilities were added.

As originally drafted, Title VII did not prohibit sex discrimination, but then Congressman Howard W. Smith introduced an amendment to do so. His motives in doing so were apparently mixed. He was a Virginia segregationist and the principal opponent of The Civil Rights Bill. He may have viewed the amendment as a tactic to delay or forestall the bill's passage. On the other hand, he

may have favored the amendment because he didn't want African Americans getting rights at the expense of white women. In any event, after some wrangling, the bill became law with the prohibition against sex discrimination in it.

Title VII was much broader than The Equal Pay Act. It prohibited discrimination not only in pay but in all terms and conditions of employment, including advertising for employees, pre-employment inquiries and testing, job qualifications, hiring and firing, promotions, and medical and pension benefits.

After I graduated from the University of Miami (Florida) School of Law in 1957, when 3% of this country's law school graduates were women, I went to work for the federal government in Washington, D.C., because at that time the government was hiring women lawyers, while private law firms and corporations generally were not.

After working for the Department of Justice and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), in October 1965, three months after it had commenced operations, I joined the EEOC as the first woman attorney in its Office of the General Counsel.

There, I found myself in a brand new job at a brand new agency with responsibility for fighting employment discrimination, including that based on sex. At that time, few Americans were aware that there was such a thing as sex discrimination. When I mentioned "women's rights" in my early speeches, the response was laughter. Words like "sex discrimination" and "women's rights" hadn't yet entered the nation's vocabulary. Furthermore, just as violence was the weapon used against those who advocated equality for African Americans, ridicule was the weapon used against those who advocated equal rights for women.

What was our country like in 1965?

Basically, men and women lived in two different worlds. By and large, a woman's place was in the home. Her role was to marry and raise a family. If she was bright, common wisdom had it that she was to conceal that brightness. She was to be attractive--but not too attractive. She was not to have career ambitions, although she could work for a few years before marriage as a secretary, saleswoman, schoolteacher, telephone operator, social worker, librarian, performer, or nurse. Hopefully, she would be a virgin when she married. When she had children, she was to raise them differently so that they, too, would continue in the modes of behavior appropriate to their sex. If she divorced, which would reflect poorly on her, she might receive an award of alimony and child support--although it was unlikely that she would actually receive the monies for more than a few years. If she failed to marry, she was an old maid, relegated to the periphery of life.

Married women could work outside the home only if dire household finances required it. Under no circumstances were they to earn more money than their husbands.

Women were not to be opinionated or assertive. They were expected to show an interest in fashion, books, ballet, cooking, sewing, knitting, and volunteer activities. Political activities were acceptable as long as they were conducted behind the scenes.

Of course, not all women wanted or were able to fit into this pattern, and there were always exceptions. But most women did what they were told because society exacted a high price from deviants.

Men, on the other hand, were the decision-makers and activists. They were the ones who became presidents, legislators, generals, police chiefs, school principals, and corporate executives. They were the heads of their households, and their wives and children were expected to defer to their wishes. Men were expected to take the initiative in dating, to have sexual experiences before marriage, to propose marriage, to bear the financial burden for the entire family, and to have little or nothing to do with running their households or raising their children. It was assumed that they would be insensitive, uncaring, and inarticulate—and interested in activities such as sports, drinking, gambling, extramarital affairs, and making money. Most men did what they were told, too.

This picture of our society was true for most of the population. There were, however, other dynamics at play in minority communities. For examples, historically, more African American women than men attended college, and the percentage of working African American mothers has traditionally been higher than the percentage of working white mothers.

In 1965, not only was most of the country uninterested in sex discrimination, so were most of the EEOCS commissioners, officials, and staff. They did not want the Commissions' limited staff and resources diverted to issues of sex discrimination. At that time, there were one hundred permanent employees at the Commissions' headquarters, most of whom were there to fight discrimination against African Americans. After all, the agency had been created in response to the movement for civil rights for African Americans. There had been no similar movement immediately before 1965 for women's rights. There had, of course, been an earlier women's movement, which culminated in 1920 when women got the right to vote. After that, for about forty years, most women forgot about the struggle for women's rights. Perhaps they thought that the right to vote would bring with it all other rights. But that did not happen.

The country and the EEOC were, however, in for a shock. In the Commission's first fiscal year, about 37 percent of the complaints filed alleged sex discrimination. These complaints raised a host of new issues that were more difficult than those raised by the complaints of race discrimination. Could employers continue to advertise in classified advertising columns headed "help wanted--male" and "help wanted --female"? Did an employer have to hire women for jobs traditionally considered men's jobs? Could airlines continue to ground or fire stewardesses when they reached the age of thirty-two or thirty-five or married? What about state protective laws that prohibited the employment of women in certain occupations, limited the number of hours they could work and the amount of weight they could lift, and required special benefits for women, such as seats, restrooms, and rest and lunch breaks? Did school boards have to keep teachers on after they became pregnant? (What would students think if they saw pregnant schoolteachers? Would they know they'd had sexual intercourse?) Did employers have to provide the same benefits on retirement to men and women even though women as a class outlived men?

Although the EEOC was responsible for issuing decisions, guidelines, and regulations that set forth

what Title VII meant, neither I nor anyone else at the Commission knew how to resolve these issues.

The issues that were most fiercely fought involved classified advertising, airline stewardesses, and state protective legislation.

The maintenance of sex-segregated classified advertising columns was of great importance to newspapers and employers. Newspapers derived increased revenue from the double columns, and employers wanted to be able to continue to recruit based on sex.

Airlines waged a strenuous battle to maintain their policies of grounding or terminating stewardesses when they reached the age of thirty-two or thirty-five or married. They argued that since they hired only women for these jobs on domestic routes, Title VII was inapplicable and they could apply any conditions of employment they chose. Most airline passengers were men, and the airlines promoted the image of the young, unmarried stewardess to attract businessmen. These policies were financially advantageous for the airlines. They cut down on the expenses incurred for salary increases related to seniority and for pension and retirement benefits.

On another controversial issue, the question of whether Title VII superseded state protective legislation, women were divided. Starting in the early 1900s, states had passed laws restricting women's employment and requiring special benefits for women. These laws were passed for a number of reasons. Some proponents of such legislation had wanted to protect both male and female employees from sweatshop conditions but feared they wouldn't be able to get laws passed for both sexes; others wanted to limit women's competition for jobs with men.

In the area of sex discrimination, the EEOC moved very slowly and conservatively, or not at all. I found myself increasingly frustrated by the unwillingness of most of the officials to come to grips with the issues, and to come to grips with them in ways that would expand employment opportunities for women.

Because I was always raising the issue of sex discrimination, my boss, the General Counsel, called me a "sex maniac."

I became the staff person who stood for aggressive enforcement of the sex discrimination prohibitions of the Act, and this caused me no end of grief. At the end of one day, after a particularly frustrating discussion with the executive director, I left the EEOC building with tears streaming down my face. I didn't know how I had gotten into this position --fighting for women's rights. No one had elected me to represent women. I didn't know why I was engaged in this battle against men who had power when I had none.

Through my work, I developed a network of support outside the EEOC. I came in contact at various government agencies with mid-level staffers like myself who were concerned with improving the rights of women. Together we formed an informal network of support and information-sharing. I would pass on to this network information on women's rights cases that were developing at the EEOC, which the members of this network would then pass on to Marguerite Rawalt, a distinguished attorney and feminist. She, in turn, would relay this

information to her network of feminist attorneys. These attorneys would then represent the complaining parties in precedent-setting sex discrimination lawsuits.

In 1966, a writer came to the EEOC. She had become famous through writing a book published in 1963 called *The Feminine Mystique*, which dealt with the frustrations of women who were housewives and mothers and did not work outside the home. Now, she was interviewing EEOC officials and staff for a second book. Her name was Betty Friedan.

When we met, Betty asked me to reveal problems and conflicts at the Commission. I told her everything was fine since as an EEOC staff member, I did not feel I could publicly speak out about the Commission's derelictions. But when she came a second time, it was on a day when I was feeling particularly frustrated. I invited her into the privacy of my office and this time I leveled with her. I told her, with tears in my eyes, that the country needed an organization to fight for women like the NAACP fought for African Americans.

Then, in June 1966, at the Third National Conference of Commission on the Status of Women in Washington, D.C., the attendees wanted to pass a resolution demanding the enforcement of Title VII for women and the reappointment of Commissioner Dick Graham, who was a feminist. They became enraged when they were told that since their meeting was being held under the auspices of the Women's Bureau in the U.S. Labor Department, they did not have the authority to pass a resolution involving another federal agency. As a result, at a luncheon at the conference, Betty Friedan and a small group planned an organization that subsequently became NOW. Its purpose, as written by Betty on a paper napkin, was "to take the actions needed to bring women into the mainstream of American society, NOW, full equality for women, in fully equal partnership with men." By the end of the day, everyone at the conference who wanted to join had tossed \$5 into a war chest and NOW had twenty-eight members. Another twenty-six founders, of whom I was one, were added that October at an organizing conference in Washington, D.C. We met in the basement of the Washington Post and drafted a statement of purpose and skeletal bylaws.

Most of us did not know each other. One of the realities of those days was that there was no national network whereby women and men interested in women's rights could come to know each other and work together. What we had in common was a frustration with the status of women and a determination to do something about it. The concept of women's rights was an idea whose time had come.

After its founding, NOW embarked upon an ambitious program of activities to get the EEOC to enforce Title VII for women. It filed lawsuits, petitioned the EEOC for public hearings, picketed the EEOC and the White House, and generally mobilized public opinion.

I became involved in an underground activity. I took to meeting privately at night in Washington with three other government lawyers devoted to women's rights. At those meetings, I discussed the inaction of the Commission that I had witnessed during that day or week with regard to women's rights, and then we drafted letters from NOW to the Commission demanding that action be taken in those areas. To my amazement, no one at the Commission ever questioned how NOW had become privy to the Commission's deliberations.

As a result of pressure by NOW, the EEOC began to take seriously its mandate to eliminate sex discrimination in employment. It conducted hearings and began to issue interpretations and decisions implementing women's rights. It prohibited sex-segregated advertising columns and, with narrow exceptions, required that all jobs, including jobs as flight cabin attendants, had to be open to men and women alike. Furthermore, a woman could not be refused employment because of the preferences of her employer, co-workers, clients, or customers, or because she was pregnant or had children. A woman who needed time off in connection with pregnancy, childbirth, or after the birth of a child was entitled to the same benefits of sick pay, leave, and pay during leave that her employer provided for employees in general who requested time off for illness or other reasons.

Laws that restricted women's employment were superseded by Title VII. Laws that required benefits for women could be harmonized with Title VII by providing the same benefits to men.

Men and women doing substantially equal work were entitled to equality in pay and other benefits, including pension and retirement benefits. They also had the right to be free of sexual harassment on the job.

Men also used the remedies provided by Title VII, although to a much lesser extent. They complained when they were excluded from traditionally female jobs, such as nursing, or were prohibited from wearing beards, mustaches, or long hair on the job.

The EEOC for the first time in this country began the collection of statistics from employers on their employment of women in various categories of employment.

NOW was the first organization formed to fight for women's rights in the mid-60s, but it was followed by many others. Traditional women's organizations, which had initially refused to join the struggle, did so later, and new organizations were formed. Unions, most of which were initially hostile to women's rights, became involved in the struggle unions were in fact later in the forefront of the pay equity struggle, the fight to secure equal pay for women for work of comparable worth or value to that of men.

Various levels of government also became more active: executive orders were issued by Presidents, federal and state laws and municipal ordinances were passed, and court decisions issued.

New government agencies were created to fight discrimination, such as the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) in the Department of Labor. The OFCCP implements executive orders that require contractors and subcontractors of the federal government to take affirmative action to hire and promote women or risk the loss of millions of dollars in government contracts.

Discrimination based on sex or marital status in the sale and rental of housing and in the granting of credit was prohibited. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibited educational institutions, from preschools through colleges and universities that received federal funds from

discriminating on the basis of sex against students and all employees, including administrative personnel and faculty members. One of the effects of Title IX has been the requirement for equality in expenditures for school athletic programs.

Legislation in 1972 gave the EEOC the power to enforce its orders in the courts. The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 codified the EEOC'S guidelines on pregnancy and leave in connection with pregnancy. In 1991, for the first time, women were given the right to secure limited monetary damages for sexual harassment and other intentional sex discrimination. About two weeks after taking office, President Clinton signed The Family and Medical Leave Act, requiring employers to provide their employees with up to twelve weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave each year in connection with the birth or adoption of a child; the serious illness of a child, spouse, or parent; or the inability of the employee to work because of a serious health condition.

Due to all this activity, the American public became aware that there was a new national priority: EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN.

Where are we today?

Our society has undergone massive change. Women are now found in large numbers in professional schools and in the professions, and, to a much lesser extent, in executive suites and legislatures.

Women now work at a host of technical and blue collar jobs previously closed to them.

In 1976, women were admitted to West Point and our other military academies, a development that was unthinkable before the women's movement. The percent of women in the military rose from less than 2% in the 1960s to 14% as of September 30, 2008, and the variety of their assignments has increased substantially. As of September 30, 2008, there were 205,396 active duty women serving in the military.

Over 750 colleges and universities have women's and gender studies programs.

The effects of Title VII have spilled over to every area of our society. Laws have changed women's rights with regard to abortion, divorce, alimony, child custody, child support, rape, jury service, appointments as administrators and executors of estates, sentencing for crimes, and admission to places of public accommodation such as clubs, restaurants, and bars. Our spoken language has changed, and much work has been done on the development of gender-neutral written language in laws, textbooks, religious texts, and publications of all sorts.

Women are now being included in clinical research studies, and we are learning that women and men react differently to different medications, that there are sex differences in the vulnerability to disease, and that even where diseases strike both sexes, they often follow different courses.

Eighteen years after the founding of NOW, Geraldine Ferraro made history by being the first woman on a national party ticket for Vice President, and, nine years after that, Janet Reno became the first woman Attorney General in our history.

In January 2007, women again made history when Nancy Pelosi became the 60th Speaker of the House of Representatives and the first woman in that position.

Women appear to have finally broken through what Speaker Pelosi calls the marble ceiling in the Congress. Women in both the House and Senate have moved up in positions of power, in the leadership and as the heads of key committees and subcommittees.

A little-known law, a relatively small organization, the developments that followed in this country, and similar movements worldwide have completely changed the face of this country and are well on their way to changing the face of the world. The increase in the number and proportion of women who work has been called the single most outstanding phenomenon of the twentieth century. We've achieved a lot, but much remains to be done.

Women now make up 57% of college students but less than 20% of college presidents. They account for more than 40% of MBA candidates, but 2% of Fortune 500 CEOs. Nearly half of Law School students are female, but women comprise only one-third of Law School faculty members and those women are concentrated in non-tenured positions. Women comprise only 25% of federal judges and less than 20% of law firm partners and Fortune 500 general counsels.

Women run City Hall in 11% of the country's 100 largest cities, and hold 16% of governorships and 17% of the seats in Congress. The U.S. ranks 69th in the world in the proportion of women in the lower House of its national legislature, behind Cuba, Uganda, Pakistan, and the Sudan. No woman has ever served as President, Vice President, or Majority Leader of our Senate.

Based on the 2000 Census, women make up an estimated 50.7% of our population, but there is only one woman on the U.S. Supreme Court, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, so the female representation of the Court is 11%.

In 2006, in the Yale Journal of Law and Feminism, there was an article entitled Why Legal Education Is Failing Women by Sari Bashi and Maryana Iskander. Based on a study, they concluded that (primarily male) Law professors treat women differently from men and reward behaviors that are more likely to be displayed by men. They made a number of recommendations suggesting that Law Schools implement changes, including the hiring of more female faculty members, so they will improve the way they educate men and women.

Women have increased their numbers and range of duties in the military, but in all the services except the Coast Guard servicewomen are restricted from serving in certain positions and certain units are closed to them.

Last month, Katie Couric, of CBS News, reported on the alarming increase of sexual assaults of servicewomen. One in three female soldiers experiences sexual assault while serving in the military compared to one in six women in the civilian world. Last month, the Pentagon released a report indicating that more than 2,900 sexual assaults were reported in 2008, up nearly 9% from the year before. For troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, reported cases increased 26% over the previous year. In a majority of cases, the offenders get only a reduction in rank or reduced pay.

And these are the reported cases; the Pentagon acknowledges that some 80% of rapes are never reported because women fear ostracism, punishment, and loss of careers.

As Congresswoman Jane Harman of California testified last July, women serving in the U.S. Military are more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire in Iraq.

There are about 200,000 women incarcerated in the U.S. in federal, state, local, and immigration detention settings--making up about 10% of the total prison population. In federal correctional facilities, 70% of guards are male and records show that correctional officials have subjected female inmates to rape, other sexual assault, sexual extortion, and groping during body searches. In addition, women are denied essential medical resources and treatments, especially during times of pregnancy and chronic or degenerative diseases.

Women in the U.S. are still subject not only to sex discrimination, but if they are older women, women of color, or have disabilities, they may be the victims of multiple forms of discrimination. They still do not get equal pay for equal work. In 1963, when The Equal Pay Act was signed, full-time year-round women workers made 59 cents on average for every dollar earned by men. By 2007, women earned 78 cents to the dollar earned by men. The fact that American women on average earn 22 cents less on the dollar than men can add up over a lifetime to an astonishing loss of \$700,000 to \$2 million.

This gap between women's and men's earnings exists, in part, because many women are still segregated into low-paying occupations and have differences in education, experience or time in the workforce. But a significant percent of this gap cannot be explained by any of those factors and is the result of discrimination.

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to our constitution has yet to be ratified by the requisite number of states --38. Three more states are needed and active efforts are currently underway in a number of states to get ratification.

Sexual harassment at school and work are significant areas of concern.

Poverty wears a female face. Women in America are more likely to be poor than men. Over half of the 37 million Americans living in poverty today are women. In 2007, 13.8 percent of females were poor compared to 11.1 percent of men.

Earlier this month, the government announced that a record 32.2 million people -- one in every 10 Americans -- received food stamps, and food banks have stated that they're running out of food. Thirty-six million Americans struggle with hunger, including 13 million children.

Homelessness is a women's issue. It is estimated that women represent as much as 50% of the homeless population in the United States. The fastest growing segment of the homeless population is female-headed families.

There is an epidemic of gender-based violence and sexual assault, including murder: 232,960 women in the U.S. were raped or sexually assaulted in 2006. That's more than 600 women every

day. We need more safe houses and services for battered women.

A June 2008 Trafficking in Persons report by the U.S. State Department stated that the United States is a destination country for thousands of men, women, and children trafficked largely from East Asia, Mexico, and Central America for the purposes of sexual and labor exploitation..

Other issues affecting women involve the continuing battle for reproductive choice and the fact that, as of October 2008, nearly 17 million women ages 18 to 64 had no health care coverage. President Obama has stated that health care reform is one of his priorities.

Today's women have to deal with new realities, such as combining a demanding position with marriage and raising a family, and finding affordable quality household help and child care. Child care is one of the major monthly out-of-pocket expenses for American families, often coming right after housing and food. A bill has been introduced in the House of Representatives--The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act--that would help low-income working parents obtain child care.

Pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and HIV/AIDS infections are serious problems for our adolescents. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported this past January that U.S. teen birth rates are the second highest among 46 countries in the developed world. Our "abstinence-only" programs haven't proven effective and we need to provide age-appropriate, medically accurate sex education in our schools.

The U.S. has not yet joined the overwhelming majority of the world's nations in ratifying the UN's Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination Against Women--CEDAW. The issue of ratifying this treaty has languished in the U.S. Senate for decades. However, it has a better-than-ever chance for U.S. Senate ratification this year, with CEDAW-supporting Democrats holding power in Washington. Senator Barbara Boxer, Chair of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee Overseeing Global Women's Issues, plans a concerted effort to seek ratification this year.

When we look beyond the U.S. to the rest of the world, the status of women is often shocking. In Third World countries, culture, religion, and law often deprive women of basic human rights and relegate them to almost subhuman status.

Violence against women is a worldwide problem. One out of every three women worldwide will be physically, sexually or otherwise abused during her lifetime with rates reaching 70 percent in some countries. This violence and abuse includes rape, domestic violence, acid burnings, dowry deaths, and so-called honor killings. Every year, violence in the home and the community devastates the lives of millions of women.

In developing countries, pressure on girls to drop out of school continues as do inadequate health care for women, female genital mutilation, kidnapping women, forced marriages and child marriages, public floggings, honor killings, bride burning, acid-spraying of female students, abortions of female fetuses, and female infanticide.

Last month Afghanistan's government quietly enacted a sweeping law restricting the rights of minority Shi'ite women and early this month, Afghanistan President Karzai signed it. It allows women to leave their homes only for a legitimate purpose, which is not defined; denies women the right to refuse to have sex with their husbands unless they're ill or menstruating; and forbids women from working or getting an education without their husbands' permission. Due to the international outcry caused by this law, President Karzai ordered that the law be reviewed. On April 10, Afghani Ambassador said Jawad declared that the legislation was not yet the law, that it was unconstitutional, and would not be passed into law. On April 15, about 300 Afghan women walked the streets of the Capital demanding repeal of this law. As they marched, they were taunted by an angry mob of about 1,000 men and some women calling them whores and hurling stones at them. The next day President Karzai said that the law will be revised.

In Saudi Arabia this month a court upheld the marriage of an 8-year-old girl to a man 50 years her senior on condition he not have sex with her until she reaches puberty.

In places like Darfur in the Sudan and the Congo, we've seen rape used as a deliberate military strategy, a weapon of war and genocide. According to the United Nations Development Program, the Congo is the worst country in the world to be a woman: an average of 1,100 women are raped in East Congo everyday.

At the end of 2004, it was estimated that women made up about half of the 30.8 million adults living with HIV/AIDS worldwide. It is thought that 98% of these women live in developing countries.

Each year more than 500,000 women worldwide die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes, almost all of them in the developing world. A woman in a developing country has a one in 60 chance of dying in pregnancy or childbirth, compared with just one in 2,100 in developed countries.

About 1 billion people (one in six) in the world live in extreme poverty, defined as living on less than \$1 per day. Seventy percent of these are women.

More than 800 million people go hungry each day, and two-thirds are women.

In the face of these dire problems, I take great hope from the election of President Barack Obama-- a lawyer married to a lawyer, both of whom are sympathetic to women's rights. He's already taken salutary steps: he's selected some outstanding women to advise and assist him in the White House and throughout the government. On January 23 this year, he signed an executive order overturning the Global Gag Rule, which was a ban on federal funds to foreign planning organizations that either offered abortions or provided information or counseling about abortion.

On January 29, President Obama signed the first bill of his presidency and it was the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act, which reversed a decision by the Supreme Court limiting the time within which charges of pay discrimination could be filed.

Last month President Obama marked International Women's Month by signing an executive order to create the first-ever White House Council on Women and Girls.

On February 27, the Obama administration announced that it is moving to rescind a regulation of the Department of Health and Human Services that took effect on President Bush's last day in office. That regulation allows health care workers to decline to provide or participate in any service that violates their beliefs, and includes services related to birth control and emergency contraception.

The changes for women we've seen in the last forty+ years have been breathtaking. They remind us that committed people working together can effect tremendous change. As Anne Frank wrote: How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to change the world.

Thank you.

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