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Women United March Speech  
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Thank you all for coming out this morning!

Like most of you, I remember waking up on November 9, 2016 hoping that my country's election of a lying, corrupt, sexual predator as president was all a bad dream. Three years later, it's undeniable that this administration has created a nightmare for reproductive freedom.

I don't have enough time to detail all the ways in which this administration has harmed your reproductive freedom, but let me list just a few.

**Internationally:**

They slashed funding for programs that provided reproductive health care and that prevented forced child marriage;

They vetoed a UN Security Council resolution aimed at eliminating the use of rape as a weapon of war.

They have treated refugees horribly – calling them terrorists, separating children from their parents, and interfering with underaged rape victims seeking abortion.

**Here at home,**

They've appointed 2 anti-choice Supreme Court justices who, with their colleagues will decide the future of Roe v. Wade this March.

They appointed another 185 judges, many of whom the American Bar Association deemed unqualified, to lifetime positions on the federal bar.

While abortion was never federally funded, they removed funding for other health services provided by organizations that also provide abortions or that even just refer patients for abortions. This funding has gone instead to so-called "crisis pregnancy centers," anti-abortion fake clinics that provide incorrect medical information and emotional manipulation for the purpose of shaming patients and keeping them from receiving abortion care.

They've taken funding from evidence-based programs proven to reduce teen pregnancies and given it to failed abstinence-only programs;

They've eliminated protections for survivors of sexual assault on college campuses; and

They've given employers the power to deny insurance coverage for contraception for ANY reason.

In many states, legislators have passed laws restricting abortion access. In North Carolina, the legislature has given millions of taxpayer dollars to fake clinics and has proposed bills that would ban some abortion procedures and require doctors to counsel patients about the availability of medically unproven and dangerous "abortion reversal."

In short, our reproductive freedom is in danger. A minority of people, mostly men, have been able to use their power to elect leaders who have robbed the rest of us of our human rights. But guess what – there are MORE OF US, and we can stop them – but only if we use OUR power.

That morning in November 2016, I didn't feel powerful at all – I felt helpless, marginalized and angry. Eventually I decided to drag my introvert self out to Charlotte's abortion clinics to see if I could help.

At the clinics, I saw masses of people, mostly middle-aged white men, yelling horrible things through loud-speaker systems at frightened patients – mostly poor people of color. At first, I naively thought I could make them understand that this wasn't the best way to get their message across. I came to realize, though, that just as rape is not a crime driven by sexual desire, harassing patients at abortion clinics is not about love of children – or anything I would have understood as “pro-life.” No – it is about power and control over fertility. These are men who are angered and threatened by anyone who refuses to play by traditional gender rules.

Since we formed RRC in 2017, I have learned a lot about power. Power doesn't come just from money, public office or physical strength - It can come from little things that we might never have seen as powerful. In my case, most of my life I'd been kind of embarrassed by my very loud laugh – so loud that my husband could hear it from a full city block away and my children used it to find me in stores. One obnoxious clinic protester who hates my laugh calls me “The Hyena.” At the clinic, though, I've seen that laughing can lighten the stress that the other volunteers and I sometimes experience. I've seen that laughing at the absurdity of a grown man standing on a ladder to yell over a privacy fence makes patients feel a little safer and tells them that if anyone deserves shaming, it's the weirdo on the ladder.

My colleagues each bring their own unique power to the group: Betty has an inspiring ability to listen and to persistently project a loving-kindness that can overwhelm even the most hateful protester. Bruce brings his respect and love for his mother, who raised him and his sister as a single mom, to his work helping clinic patients. Other members have discovered a boldness or an ability to tolerate conflict that they didn't realize they had. And we've all discovered that perhaps the most powerful thing we can do is to continue showing up to offer help.

Working together with other members of the Charlotte Reproductive Action Network, we've been able to gather crowds to join us in protesting abortion bans. We've worked together to ease the stigma of abortion care and to pass a new Noise Ordinance making it illegal to use amplified sound in front of Charlotte's medical facilities. And we will keep working until abortion is recognized as a human right, available to anyone, regardless of their income, race, age or immigration status.

What I'm saying is that **YOU HAVE POWER**, and it's time to **USE that POWER!** We need every one of you. Women - run for office! The people at Lillian's List will give you the information and support you need. And if that isn't for you, you can donate money to candidates who promise to champion reproductive justice. If you don't have money to donate, you can donate your time by canvassing or phone-banking. It goes without saying that every person here who can should **exercise their power to vote!** If your age or legal status doesn't permit you to vote, you can register voters or work on a campaign. And please, everyone, use the power of your voice to spread the word that abortion is both normal and a human right.

It's time to **USE YOUR POWER!** I look forward to working and laughing with you!



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