

# Life and Liberty for Women

abortion safe and legal

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## Why We Formed Life and Liberty for Women

I believe women, not just fetuses, have a right to life and liberty and that Roe vs. Wade correctly and morally balanced the right to life and liberty of both.

I decided to form [Life and Liberty for Women](#) because I am terrified that women once again will have to face the devastating consequences of illegal abortion and I believe that legal abortion has never been in as much jeopardy as it is today.

I have spent the last ten years working to keep abortion safe and legal in this country. I have written dozens of letters to the editor and op-ed pieces, publicly debated anti-abortion rights individuals, spoke at rallies, and testified before Colorado State House Committees on abortion bills. I have worked candidate campaigns including Co-Coordinating the 1992 U.S. Senate race of Senator Patty Murray in Washington state in the county I lived in. I have also worked feverishly on several abortion issue campaigns, and spent four years, 1994-1998 as a member of the Board of Directors of Colorado NARAL (National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League). Colorado NARAL taught me a lot about the abortion rights issue and organizing to protect abortion rights.

I am forty-something and the mother of two daughters. I believe every woman has a right to make her own reproductive decisions based on her own set of moral and religious values. I do not believe that anyone else should make such a decision for a woman including legislators or Christian anti-abortion extremists. Without a right to make her own decision about how

many children she'll have and when she'll have them, no woman can make a quality life for herself or her family. And, without access to any and all resources to effect a decision about when and how many children she'll have, from contraceptives to adoption to safe abortion, a woman cannot make a quality life for herself and her family. History teaches us that very clearly.

History also teaches us that control of women's reproductive decisions equals control over women and their access to all of what the world offers outside of the domain of the "home and raising babies." Anti-abortion religious extremists would like nothing better than for all women, most particularly white women, to go home and take care of hordes of babies. (Ricki Solinger discusses the issue of race and motherhood in her book, "Wake Up Little Susie, Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe vs. Wade", 1992 and in the book, "Abortion Wars" in the chapter Pregnancy and Power - 1950-1970, published in 1998.) Lynn S. Chancer, in *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming a Movement*, 1990 stated it this way. "Feminists remain on the political defensive-unless, that is, we become appropriately infuriated at the thought of exactly whom and what anti-abortionists are trying to exclude, whom they are trying to control. Clearly, control is aimed at women as a whole. The ire of the anti-abortionists cannot be understood outside the context of a larger sexual and cultural reaction to feminist gains, terrifying precisely because they have opened a Pandora's box with the promise that the traditionally gendered world may never be the same again."

Lawrence H. Tribe, in *Abortion the Clash of Absolutes*, 1990, spoke of Kristin Luker's study which revealed, he said, "that in general, right-to-life activists believe that men and women are different by nature and that they have intrinsically different roles to play in society. Luker found a fear among many such activists that the incorporation of women into traditionally male roles in the workplace threatens to strip women of the role that is uniquely and properly theirs. Indeed, those who most violently oppose the pro-choice position make an explicit

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connection between such opposition and their desire that women be put back in their traditional roles. Randall Terry, the originator of the militant Operation Rescue, sees the logic behind abortion rights as a force that would destroy 'the traditional family unit' and 'motherhood.' But," continues Tribe, "whether Terry sees the economic and social freedom of women as the root cause behind abortion or sees abortion rights as freeing women to lead lives as full participants in the economy and in public life, his avowed goal is to put the genie of equality back in the bottle. Whether in the name of traditional sex roles or in the name of a traditional sexual morality, much opposition to abortion seems really to be about the control of women."

Tribe concludes his book with this, "To the pro-life advocate, it may become clear in the end that at a deep level, the opposition to women's having the right to choose to end a pregnancy is more about the control of women than about the sanctity of life or of nature. If this is so, then opposition to a right to choose seeks to restrict the liberty of unwilling women in the name of something less than the 'absolute' of the protection of human life. And if this is the case, then even the pro-life advocate may conclude that the objection to abortion rights ought to yield, as a matter of morality, to the claim of the woman to her liberty and equality. To conscript a woman to save a life might be one thing. To conscript her to save a way of life, one in which she is relegated to a second-class role, is another thing entirely."

In addition, any individual playing with a full deck knows that making abortion illegal will not stop abortion from occurring. Since the beginning of time, law notwithstanding, women have made life-threatening sacrifices not to have a baby they are not emotionally or financially prepared to raise. Over turning Roe vs. Wade or so restricting access, in any manner, as to effectively do that, only makes abortion more dangerous for women.

Today, in the 21st century, should abortion become illegal, more women than before Roe, especially young women, will opt to self-abort and will place their health at great risk and many will die. Others will opt for a

back-alley abortion. If lucky, these women will find an abortion provider who provides safe abortion services today, who will be willing to risk everything to go underground to provide safe abortion health care services to women. Those women will not place their health and life at great risk. Other women will find an underground "provider" who has little or no medical training and those women won't just be placing their health at risk, but more likely than not, they will lose their lives.

Because abortion will exist as an alternative to an unintended pregnancy whether it is legal or not, making abortion illegal won't save "babies" lives as anti-abortion extremists pretend. And they know that. They just don't want to admit it or discuss it. In addition what they also know but ignore, is that illegal abortion places women's lives at risk that today are not at risk. For that reality, anti-abortion extremists have no answer. It really is a case of out of site - out of mind.

And, in addition, we'll see more abandoned babies and dead babies, especially by young teen girls. Desperate, scared young girls and women, without financial resources to obtain an illegal abortion or raise a child, will do desperate things. Ironically, several states, my own state of Colorado included, have written laws in recent years that either makes the accountability for abandoning a child either non-existent or barely existent, if the child is taken to a hospital, police or fire station. This type of legislation is an outgrowth of the dramatically shrinking access to abortion in the last 20 years, from availability of providers nationwide to laws that place an undue burden on women's right to seek an abortion. It is also an acknowledgement that unwanted babies given birth to by scared unprepared young girls and women, is on the rise and of deep concern to our society.

The other related and unspoken truth that anti-abortion rights people try desperately to ignore and won't discuss is the truth and reality about adoption, their only answer to an unintended pregnancy in which parenting is not an option. Anti-abortion extremists will never tell you that a choice to parent or give up a baby for adoption is fraught with no

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less emotion, conflict or potential serious consequences than a decision to have an abortion. The children who are neglected, abused and living in poverty are proof. So are the emotional stories about birth moms and the children they gave up for adoption.

I, like every other abortion rights individual I know, believe that all three options to an unintended pregnancy are viable moral options and which one is ultimately decided on must be decided by the woman faced with the decision. It cannot be any other way. It would be immoral to force a woman to continue a pregnancy just as it would be immoral to force her to end her pregnancy.

I like every other abortion rights individual I know, believe that prevention is worth a pound of cure. We believe that abstinence is the best form of birth control. But for individuals, men and women alike, who choose to engage in sex, we believe pregnancy and disease prevention should be of paramount concern. Many anti-abortion religious extremists don't believe in any form of artificial birth control and their so-called crisis pregnancy centers won't refer women to physicians who would provide them with birth control information or birth control pills and devices. For these individuals it's abstinence or nothing. These anti-abortion religious extremists are out of touch with not just mainstream America, but with reality.

Lawrence H. Tribe, speaking in his book, again about Kristin Luker's study of abortion and motherhood, said, "Believing that an important and natural function of women is the bearing of children, such right-to-life activists (themselves often women) evidently believe that abortion and, indeed, all methods of fertility control subordinate the special value of pregnancy and the uniqueness of the woman's natural place. These activists accordingly oppose artificial means of contraception that interfere with the unpredictable possibility of pregnancy."

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## From the Horses Mouth

"We are totally opposed to abortion under any circumstances. We are also opposed to all forms of birth control with the exception of natural family planning (the rhythm method)."

- Judie Brown, American Life Lobby.

"At its core, birth control is anti-child. You consummate your marriage as often as you like and if you have babies, you have babies."

- Randall Terry, founder Operation Rescue.

"I think contraception is disgusting..."

- Joe Scheidler, Director, Pro-Life League.

The Pearson Foundation Manual on how to start and operate your own "pro-life" outreach crisis pregnancy center, explicitly instructs counselors "never to counsel or refer for artificial contraceptives or sterilization."

Catholic Values Investment Trust will not invest in companies that manufacture contraceptives or abortion equipment, even removing the drugstore Rite Aid from its investments because the store sells contraceptives. And the Timothy Plan opposes companies that make contraceptives and abortion products, including insurance companies that cover abortion.

So, anti-abortion extremists promote the criminalization of abortion in all circumstances. That position places women's health and life at risk from unsafe medical care, but they don't care. What a bummer, they say, that's her problem. (Of course you'll note that not one "daddy" risks his health or life in the back-alley. That's a bummer too, isn't it?) Anti-abortion extremists also know that not one "baby" will be saved when abortion happens on a woman's bathroom floor or in a back-alley. Additionally, they are adamant that no artificial birth control should be legal or used by anyone. And they want us to believe that this is about "babies" lives, not controlling women's lives?

## Shortcomings of the Current Abortion Rights Movement

Over the last ten years I have become increasingly aware that the current abortion rights organizations have some major shortcomings which I believe left women vulnerable to the messages, the lies, and distortions of the anti-abortion movement.

The religious right has been incredibly successful at raising millions upon millions of dollars from their dedicated supporters. They have also been incredibly skillful at molding the emotionally charged, warm fuzzy messages and strategies that have been responsible for changing not only the landscape and premise of the abortion debate, but also boxing the abortion rights movement into a defensive stance. Playing defense has nearly cost the abortion rights movement Roe vs. Wade. They barely succeeded at staving off a direct hit on Roe, beginning in the 80's with anti-abortion Presidents and continuing into the 90's with an increasingly anti-abortion Congress and many anti-abortion state legislatures. Marlene Gerber Fried, From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom, 1990 articulated it this way, "In the aftermath of Webster, fear of further losses is causing some mainstream pro-choice groups to continue the defensive posture that has characterized the pro-choice movement since Roe vs. Wade. They argue that if we fail to compromise, we will lose everything. The political implications of this stance are already being felt."

The abortion rights movement, has been working with a limited supply of money, and an ever shrinking, frightened, discouraged, and complacent base of supporters. They were forced to fight tough defensive battles to stave off legislative attacks both in Congress and at the state level, all with limited success. They were forced to fight state ballot measures and work feverishly to increase their influence in state electoral politics.

The only saving grace? Persistent, and somewhat successful, legal challenges to anti-abortion laws, the Supreme Court's current narrow margin reluctant to over turn

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Roe vs. Wade because of the public's fear, albeit shrinking, of ALL abortions being banned AND a fear of government limiting personal freedom. These four events, as luck would have it, has barely, and for now, kept the abortion rights movement in the ball game.

How did we get to this point of desperation?

First, Ricki Solinger in her essay "Poisonous Choice", printed in a book titled "Bad Mothers", makes this case. The adoption of the word and actions of "choice" over the word and actions of "right" in 1973 by abortion rights advocates in order to win legalization of abortion, has had far reaching consequences. Eventually, Solinger notes, the word "choice" became associated "with bad women making bad choices."

In her essay, Solinger deals with the question of "Who is a mother? Who decides, and using what criteria?" Solinger's purpose in the essay was to "consider the consequences for millions of women in the United States of the brief flicker, and then the withering away, of 'rights' claims in the pregnancy/motherhood arena, and the substitution of 'choice' as the governing principle - the principle that girls and women must count on in order to own their own bodies and their destinies. I will," she says, "argue that the concept of 'choice' endangers many women in this country. And the danger is broad and deep, going well beyond the issue of abortion."

Solinger's piece is insightful and she reminds us of what we can never escape, the connection between motherhood, choice, and class privilege. Solinger says, "As with slave women, poor Catholic urban women, and white unwed mothers in the past, many contemporary women are cast as lacking the right to claim motherhood status or to escape sanctions for having made the claim. But 'choice' has a new trenchant relevancy for public policy, as it provides the anti-welfare constituency with a justification for ending benefits and provides anti-abortion proponents with justification for tightening access to abortion. After a quarter of a century, it is clear that 'choice', a term that many people continue to use as if it is

interchangeable with 'rights', operates in a context quite alienated from women's rights."

Second, I am deeply concerned about a strategy that William Saleten, writing in 1998 in *Abortion Wars*, edited by Ricki Solinger, spoke of. **(Recommended reading "Bearing Right - How Conservatives Won the Abortion War" by William Saleten, 2003)** It's a strategy that was conceived of in the early 80's by a few abortion rights strategists who worked to develop what Saleten calls an aggressive conservative anti-government message rather than women's rights message in order to win the votes of independents and moderate republicans. And while it did indeed have the intended consequence of broadening the base of "pro-choice" voters, it also had a devastating unintended consequence. In *Abortion Wars*, Saleten said, "There is an old maxim in politics that to broaden your base of support, you must narrow your agenda. That is what the conservative message strategy accomplished. It attracted moderate and conservative voters to the abortion rights movement by muting the liberal feminist elements of the movement's message."

Saleten believes that this conservative strategy was successful for a libertarian backlash against reviving abortion restrictions, a backlash that staved off, even "crushing", says Saleten, a direct hit on *Roe vs. Wade* by the Supreme Court in the *Casey* decision in 1992. But Saleten notes that the abortion rights movement lost control of that conservative message strategy. He says that the abortion rights movement "broadened their base at the price of narrowing their agenda...(and) they never bargained for the latter consequence... And they did not foresee that by demanding less government and more sovereignty for families, they were thematically sanctioning those restrictions." He was speaking of restrictions like parental notice/consent laws, 24-hour waiting periods, and bans on public funding.

Saleten explains in detail, the unintended consequence of this message strategy. "This is not to say that the conservative

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message persuaded swing voters to support such restrictions. They needed no such persuasion. What the conservative message gave these voters," Saleten says, "was a libertarian rationale that allowed them to identify themselves as pro-choice without renouncing those restrictions. They could embrace parental involvement laws as an extension of their belief in the sovereignty of families. They could spurn public funding of abortions as an affront to their belief in smaller government. A pro-choice message that called for less government and more family sovereignty was music to their ears."

"In hindsight," Saleten continues, "the architects of the conservative message would like to set these voters straight. They would like to explain that being pro-family does not mean favoring parental involvement laws and that being anti-government does not mean opposing public funding of abortions. From the moment they expounded their conservative theme, these architects assumed they were in charge of its interpretation. They failed to anticipate how ideas, once launched into the currents of politics, develop lives of their own. In the wake of Webster, the conservative pro-choice message attracted new exponents and new interpreters. Abortion rights activists lost control of it."

Clearly, the unintended consequence of this conservative message strategy has placed current abortion rights organizations in a precarious position. They no longer, if they ever did, control the message strategy, and find themselves torn between how to keep those voters at the same time they set them straight. My concern has been a demonstrated fear by the abortion rights movement to "setting these voters straight." That fear has also been responsible, I believe, for the failure of the abortion rights movement to keep their base of supporters engaged and energized. That left the swing voters, and the base of supporters of the abortion rights movement as well, unprotected and prey for the exploitation and manipulation by the anti-abortion religious extremists who salivated at the movement's miscalculation and fear and who proceeded to take advantage of it.

I formed **Life and Liberty for Women** to articulate the messages that will set the swing voters straight and create enthusiasm and engagement, once again, from our base of abortion rights supporters. I am confident about exactly how to do both. I have articulated the messages in letters to the editor and op-ed pieces and spoken at abortion rights rallies, in which supporters said they were glad I had the courage to say what I said the way I said it. The way I intend to say it through **Life and Liberty for Women**. Not surprisingly, my most ardent supporters have been from our grassroots - those who are the most steadfast supporters of abortion rights. I believe it is because they are starved for the forthrightness of a message of abortion RIGHTS and an EMOTIONAL delivery that excites them and deepens their conviction for abortion rights. Marlene Gerber Fried, in *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming a Movement*, 1990 said, "The activists who are flocking to the movement are receptive to a more radical politics than those being offered by the mainstream organizations."

A very successful anti-abortion exploitation of this message strategy. Anti-abortion religious extremists constructed a powerful emotional anti-woman theme. That theme continues to pit poor "bad women/mothers" against middle class "good women/mothers". That theme also uses all that the word "choice" encompasses in an attempt to prove that women really cannot be good moral beings capable or trusted with making good moral decisions and therefore must be reined in.

The religious right extremists then cleverly crouched this misogynist and divisive theme in an emotional message that says, without apology, that a fetus has a right to life and liberty that surpasses a woman's right to life and liberty from conception to birth. No exceptions. Ever.

Tanya Melich, a republican woman, evidenced this nightmare for us in living color in her book, *The Republican War Against Women*. In 1981 a religious right wing extremist junior senator from North Carolina, John East, introduced one of

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several "human life" constitutional amendments. Melich writes, "East's amendment championed the words of the Republican platform that gave a fertilized egg more rights than a woman. It didn't simply abrogate Roe vs. Wade by making abortion a crime; it made the fetus superior to the woman. The amendment's strict principle of fetal personhood permitted no exceptions, not even for the life of the mother. Abortion would be murder, and a woman who underwent it would be a sinner. She could be charged with murder either directly or as an accessory as could all others involved-including doctors and other health professionals."

Documenting this capitulation is The Center for Gender Equality established by former Planned Parenthood executive director, Fay Wattleton. The Center for Gender Equality found, in a poll conducted in 1998, that 53% of women say abortion should be illegal in all circumstances or be allowed only in the case of rape, incest, or to save a woman's life. Further and equally as frightening is a comprehensive survey of 1999 college freshman which found that only half support efforts to keep abortion legal, a record-low figure after six years on the decline.

Additional evidence from The National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League's yearly state by state review for 1999 reveals the following;

A. "More anti-choice legislation (affecting not just abortion but also contraception, sex education and the rights of pregnant women) was introduced and enacted in the states in 1999 than in any previous year, with 439 measures introduced and 70 enacted. This report reveals an escalation of anti-choice legislative activity over the last five years - the number of anti-choice measures enacted has skyrocketed almost 300% since 1995."

B. "In the last six years, Congress voted 120 times on reproductive health issues. Pro-choice Americans lost all but 22 of these votes."

Add to this the harassment of women seeking abortion and family planning

services by anti-abortion extremists outside of our clinics, acts of vandalism to our clinics, and the murder of our providers and staff. All committed in an effort to intimidate and scare providers into not performing abortions and intimidating and scaring women into not exercising their right to an abortion. Harassing women is also about shaming women into denying that they, not just the fetus, also have a right to life and liberty. And harassing women destroys their belief in themselves as good moral beings making good moral decisions when they decide that termination of their pregnancy is in the best interest of both themselves and the fetus they are pregnant with.

I believe that to reverse the unintended effects of the abortion rights conservative message strategy, wipe away the consequence and aftermath of the language of choice, undo the damage the anti-abortion messages and scare tactics have done and to ensure the survival of Roe vs. Wade, both a community and mass media education program is necessary. I also believe the message must be a progressive, aggressive message about RIGHTS. But it isn't a message about just a woman's right but rather a honest forthright message about balancing the right to life and liberty of woman and fetus, so wisely and morally done in Roe vs. Wade. It is the kind of message that current abortion rights organizations can't speak, because they are what I call the "business suit" part of the movement because they must lobby legislators, conduct electoral work, and because they are the deliverers of the conservative message strategy to the swing voters. But I can speak the message of RIGHTS, with [Life and Liberty for Women](#).

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## What Life and Liberty for Women Will Do

I believe in and respect my sister abortion rights organizations. It is imperative for current abortion rights organizations to continue to work through the legislative and electoral process, beating back and staving off restrictions on women's right to access safe and legal abortion as best they can. They have to do what they can to protect Roe from a fatal blow by the religious right anti-abortion extremists. Let me make clear that I have no intention of duplicating the electoral or legislative work that NARAL and Planned Parenthood do. They do that vital work with an expertise I could never duplicate. In fact, I will continue to support their work with my dollars and my volunteer time.

However, I hold no illusions about the skepticism of my own abortion rights movement in my "radical" approach, my message, forthrightness, or the language I will use about abortion rights. I have already experienced such in varying degrees. But that is okay.

I view the current abortion rights organization's response to me as predictable, especially in a time when Roe vs. Wade is under such siege both at the federal and state level and their resources are stretched to the maximum. I'll be tolerated and someday, I am sure, I'll be welcomed into the fold, because my gut tells me that I am right - absolutely right about what I am doing.

If **Life and Liberty for Women** is successful, current abortion rights organizations will be able to expand their base of support without giving away the right to life and liberty of either a woman or fetus, without placing any woman's health and life at risk, and without giving one inch of ground to anti-abortion extremists.

In addition, should **Life and Liberty for Women** find success, then we can move toward a victory never before seen - poor women, of all races, having the same access to abortion and contraceptive services as their more well off sisters. Ricki Solinger, in *Abortion Wars, A Half Century of*

Struggle, 1950-2000, 1998, said "The task before us is to revitalize a vast feminist movement so that women's determination can be exercised in a climate that honors the relationship between reproductive autonomy and citizenship rights for each and every female."

That's when we'll know we've truly succeeded.

**Life and Liberty for Women** must utilize frank, progressive, and aggressive messages. Those messages will inform and promote an understanding by women and men about the history of abortion rights and the current status and threats by anti-abortion extremists against the right and access to safe and legal abortion. Those messages will promote an understanding by women and men of the consequences of illegal abortion to women's health and life, the morality and correctness of balancing of life and liberty of a woman and fetus. Those messages will also promote an understanding by women and men of the necessity of comprehensive age-appropriate sex education, contraceptive availability, and the necessity of taking personal responsibility when deciding to be sexually active.

**Life and Liberty for Women** must also educate and challenge men to become more responsible in the sex act, more responsible in pregnancy and disease prevention. Over and over again I hear men and women both saying that women who don't want to be pregnant should simply say no and abstain. And they express no sympathy for a woman who engages in a sex act, particularly outside of marriage, for just the pleasure of sexual gratification itself, without contraceptive forethought. Yet, these same individuals do not hold men to the same standard of accountability and that's wrong, unfair, and immoral.

It's a fact that when used consistently and correctly, condoms are 98% effective in the prevention of pregnancy. So if every man, married or not, engaging in a sex act in which he didn't want to become a father as a result, correctly used a condom, just think about how many less unintended

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pregnancies would be occurring. Men must be held accountable for their engagement in each and every sex act in which they do not correctly use a condom!

**Life and Liberty for Women** must confront and challenge the shame the anti-abortion movement has left women feeling about legal abortion and their right to life and liberty. We must challenge the anti-abortion extremist position that fetuses have a right to life and liberty over a woman from conception to birth. No exceptions. Ever.

**Life and Liberty for Women** must also challenge the rhetoric from the religious right extremists that says that women are not good moral beings making good moral decisions when they decide to terminate an unintended pregnancy consistent with their right to do so, clearly outlined in Roe vs. Wade.

The fact is, potential life is entitled to quality of life. The fact is, it's not immoral or wrong for any woman to decide that she cannot provide for her child the quality of life her child deserves.

It also isn't wrong or immoral for a woman to determine that she cannot give up her child for adoption.

And finally, it isn't wrong or immoral for a woman to determine that terminating her pregnancy is right, moral, and consistent with her own set of values and her conscience.

Finally, **Life and Liberty for Women** must promote women and men's understanding that it is essential, right and moral for public policy to stand front and center and fulfill its obligation and responsibility.

Public policy must not make any judgements about the morality of abortion because the determination of when life begins is not a function of public policy. Public policy must honor every woman's right to make her own reproductive decisions, make her own judgement about when life begins, in alignment with her own set of religious and moral values. Public policy does so by seeing to the legality, safety, and

accessibility to all three options to an unintended pregnancy: parenting, adoption, and abortion.

A strong mass media and community presence with progressive messages declaring, without shame, with great pride, the morality of legal abortion and contraceptive availability and use and the immorality of illegal abortion, is a must if Roe vs. Wade is to survive. Such a strategy, I believe, will move a majority of the public back to a strong belief and commitment to keeping abortion safe and legal, today, tomorrow, and forever.

Peggy E. Loonan  
Founder and Executive Director,  
**Life and Liberty for Women**

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