

*Statement of Debra Ness
President-Elect, National Partnership for Women & Families
March for Women's Lives
April 25, 2004*

Wow! What a thrill it is to look out on this sea of pro-choice faces, to know that hundreds of thousands of people have come from all over the country – all over the world – to stand up for women's lives. It's been a long time since America's pro-choice majority has dominated the scene. Too long. But we're here today to change that. With this march, we begin a new era.

I have to be honest. These have been hard times for those of us who care about women's lives – who care about women's dignity and ability to control their own destiny. It is a strange irony, that in America today, we have a pro-choice majority, but an anti-choice President, an anti-choice Vice President, and anti-choice Congress, and an increasingly anti-choice judiciary.

It is frightening to think that our fundamental rights are so gravely threatened. And it is clear that we cannot sit back and let an anti-choice minority rule the day. That is why we are here today.

We're here to tell politicians to take the politics out of science. It's time for the FDA to make sure that emergency contraception is available over-the-counter to any woman who needs it. It's time to give young people the sexuality education they need to avoid unintended pregnancy. It's time to invest in stem cell research, which holds so much promise to save women, men and children from dreadful disease and disability. And it's time to stop appointing anti-choice zealots to our nation's most important health and science advisory bodies.

We're here to tell lawmakers to stop pitting fetal rights against maternal rights. To require insurers to cover contraception for women, the same way they cover Viagra for men. And we're here to tell lawmakers to end the unconscionable gag rule, which is causing more abortions - not less - and killing thousands of women and children throughout the world. Stop asking us to believe that you want to stop abortion when you put contraception out of reach for women who need it.

Yes, today we are here to usher in a new era. If Tom DeLay wants to outlaw abortion, procedure by procedure, he is going to learn that tyranny has a price. If John Ashcroft wants to subpoena the medical records of women who choose abortion, he is going to learn that, in America, women will fight to protect their freedoms. And if George W. Bush wants to appoint a Supreme Court Justice who will take away our right to choose, he is going to witness the real power of this nation's pro-choice majority.

We are a pro-choice nation. We will not let lawmakers play politics with women's lives. We will not return to the days when a woman had to risk her life in order to end an impossible pregnancy.

Abortion is the most personal and private decision any woman will ever face. And it is women, not government, who must make the decisions that shape our lives. Today, we march.

Tomorrow, the next day and the next day, we will fight for our rights. We will reclaim this debate. And we will secure our right to choose – for ourselves, our daughters and our families.

Thank you.