

Thank you for having me here today to discuss “A State of Crisis: Examining the Urgent Need to Protect and Expand Abortion Rights and Access in the United States.”

I accepted your invitation because I’m one of the few people old enough to know how bad it was and could get again.

What's happening in Texas is not only a local issue or a women's issue, it is a step against democracy and control of our own voices and bodies. Remember, when Hitler was elected -- and he was elected -- his first official act was to padlock the family planning clinics and declare abortion a crime against the state.

Mussolini did the same.

Because they know that controlling reproduction is the first step in a controlling state.

We must stand for democracy and in opposition to **Texas Senate Bill 8**.

Otherwise, the United States is very close to turning back the clock to the days of the 1950's.

What were those days like? I can tell you. I was there. They were filled with danger for women and guilt for both women and men - a time when the one-in-three-or-four women who needed an abortion at sometime in her lifetime had to enter a criminal underground, without even the most basic medical safeguards or protection from sexual exploitation.

I lived it. In the 1950s, I was working as a waitress in London. I had escaped an engagement to a very nice man here at home, knowing that marriage would be a big mistake for both of us, and was awaiting a visa that would allow me to study in India. That fellowship was to be my bridge to a different life, yet I also had realized that I was pregnant.

After what seemed an eternity of confusion and fear, I found a very kind and brave doctor who was willing to help me by using the loophole allowed to a few women in that era of hypocrisy. He would sign a statement that pregnancy was dangerous to my physical or mental health. "But you must promise me only two things," he said. "You must never tell anyone my name. And you must do what you want to do with your life." I'm sure he is long dead by now, yet I am grateful to him still to this day.

NOW, in this country some many want to declare a fertilized egg to be a legal person, thus not only criminalizing abortion, but nationalizing women's bodies through out our childbearing years by establishing a direct relationship between the government and a woman's womb.

Indeed, laws already in existence deprive poor women who must depend on the government for healthcare, young women without parental or judicial permission, and even women in the U.S. military, of the reproductive rights available to other women. Many of them are already the victims of illegal and unsafe abortions that become their only recourse.

In the 1950s, the fact that I could be "helped" at all was significant. I could not have had the same safe and legal abortion in the U.S., where draconian anti-abortion laws were causing even more deaths than in England. Even so, I could afford to pay, as thousands of women could not.

What would a return to the dark days of U.S. history mean? I remember women who died from septic abortions. I remember children who were left motherless by women who simply wanted to have no more children than they could care for. Already, the anti-abortion rightwing has created such martyrs as Rosie Jimenez, who died in 1977, the first of many women to be killed by the Hyde Amendment that denies Medicaid funding for abortion, or Becky Bell, who died in 1988, the first of many young women to be killed by the parental consent laws that caused her to seek an illegal abortion rather than disappoint a loving family.

Standing up for reproductive justice in Texas is not only standing up for women but standing up for democracy. Without decision making power over our own bodies, there IS no democracy.