

Women launch push to protect abortion rights

By Sarah Stewart Taylor
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON — Thousands of abortion rights supporters from around the country gathered here two weekends ago to rally and march for reproductive rights and to signal their fear that an anti-choice justice may soon be appointed to the Supreme Court.

Joining the veterans of pre-Clinton era marches were large numbers of younger activists, wearing tank tops and shorts and carrying signs with such slogans as "Young Feminists Mobilizing."

Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization for Women, a main sponsor of the march, said she has been visiting college campuses around the country over the past month and that 160 college campuses were represented at the event.

Despite the energy and optimism of the crowd, Ireland said she doesn't want women or men to forget that the threat of the Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade* is very real.

"We have greater resources than at any point in our history and I think the threat is greater," she said in an interview before the event.

Marchers seemed to agree the threat is real.

"I want to know that if I ever need an abortion I'll be able to get one," said one marcher, 18-year-old Laura Bullock, a high school senior from Harrisburg, Pa.

"I'm just dumbfounded that it has to be such an issue. It should just be a given for everyone. And having Bush in office, I just felt like I wanted to come up here and

protest something," added her friend, 18-year-old Adam Shenk, also from Harrisburg.

Complacent During Clinton Years, Advocates Now Must Gird for Battle

The event, with 150 additional individual sponsors and organizations, kicks off a planned four-year lobbying campaign to counter the anti-choice policies of the new Bush administration, said NOW President Ireland.

Before the large crowd marched up Constitution Avenue past the Supreme Court and then down to the mall for a reproductive health fair, Ireland and other speakers told activists that the Bush administration's anti-choice policies are a serious threat to women's freedoms.

"There was after 1992 an unfortunate complacency that settled in over abortion rights supporters who breathed a sigh of relief that Clinton was elected," Ireland said last week. "There was that sense of complacency and people just went back to their lives."

But abortion rights have been slowly eroded over the last decade in the chambers of state legislatures, speakers said.

"A woman's right to choose is fundamental," said Kate Michelman, head of the National Abortion Rights Action League, telling the crowd to "vote, educate, talk to people. Commit to talking to friends who don't believe a woman's right to choose can be taken away."

Bylye Avery of the National Black Women's Health Project told marchers: "What we have to remember is that we are walking the high ground here ... The greatest

right a woman has is to have a life and to have, absolutely, control over managing her fertility."

While speakers touched on a number of progressive issues, including freedom of speech and environmentalism, the main focus of the day was organizing pro-choice Americans around the issue of Supreme Court appointments.

Preparing Now to Head Off Anti-Choice Replacement for O'Connor

With the near certainty that

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor will step down this summer, Ireland and other advocates say pro-choice Americans must act now to ensure that the court doesn't swing anti-choice. The court has narrowly upheld abortion rights in recent cases, voting by only a 5-4 margin. O'Connor's has been the swing vote, insisting the laws protect women's health, and her departure will leave the future of abortion rights in doubt.

"If we wait until she has already stepped down," Ire-

land said, "it will be too late." If Bush has the chance to appoint a new justice during the summer, college campuses will be empty, Ireland said, and activists will have a hard time building momentum.

"We must begin now a filibuster campaign," said Eleanor Smeal of the Feminist Majority. Smeal encouraged marchers to tell pro-choice U.S. Senators that they must filibuster the confirmation hearing of any candidate for the Supreme Court who

doesn't support abortion rights. Afterward, activists signed paper and electronic petitions directed at their representatives.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler, a New York Democrat who has long been a staunch proponent of abortion rights, told the crowd that supporters of a woman's right to choose face an increasingly hostile White House and Congress.

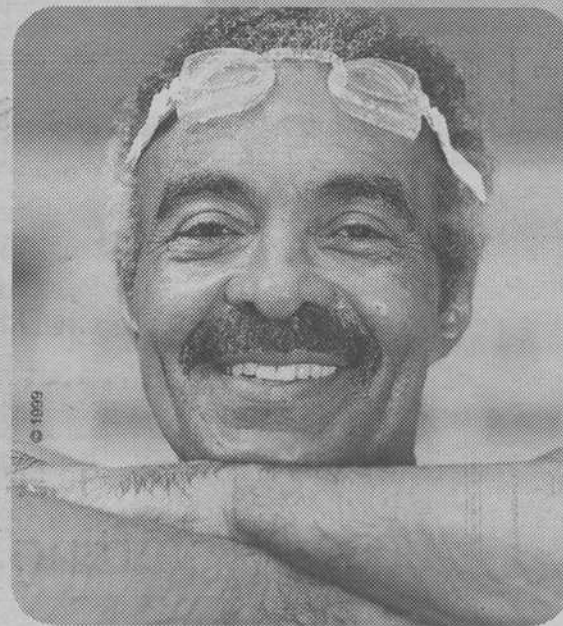
"This is not a president who we can trust to protect the health and safety of (See *Abortion*, Page 13)

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Court

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racial profiling, curbside justice that afflicts people of color: not only African-Americans — Latinos, working families, people who appear to be from the Middle East and Asian-Americans.

"We are the ones who 'broad discretion' is aimed at: at curbside, traffic stops, on street corners," he said. "This is not a good idea—not in the interests of populations in this country who are routinely profiled."

Bositis said Blacks will continue to be disproportionately targeted by police.

"In drug arrests, if you are not stopped, you will not get arrested," Bositis says. "White men just don't get stopped as much. A White man can have 500 lbs of drugs in his car, but if he's not going to get stopped, it wouldn't happen, he can't be arrested."

Ruffin says people aren't profiled in accord with their link to criminal activity.

"They are not profiling the Timothy McVeighs of the world," Ruffin said of the convicted terrorist scheduled to be executed early next month for his role in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. McVeigh is White.

"So this is just one more—more latitude and license to police in profiling," he added.



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