

### Abortion-Rights March Targets Bush

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WASHINGTON -- Abortion-rights activists turned out by the hundreds of thousands Sunday, packing the National Mall with a sea of pink signs and a warning to the White House that they will go to the polls in November.

The ACLU and Planned Parenthood, along with about 1,400 other organizations, organized the March for Women's Lives after a series of legislative setbacks that they say could lead to a reversal of *Roe vs. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court ruling that legalized abortion nationwide.

The march was one of the biggest ever on the Mall. Organizers said the crowd was much larger than at the 1992 March for Women's Lives, which National Park Police said drew about 500,000. The Park Police no longer gives official crowd counts, but the Associated Press quoted police sources as informally estimating the number at 500,000 to 800,000.

Representatives from at least 56 countries joined American men and women from across the nation at the march, saying the Bush administration's anti-abortion policies affect women everywhere.

Speakers including actress Susan Sarandon and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright blamed White House policies for the deaths of thousands of women worldwide--caused, they said, by the ban on federal funding for family-planning groups that work abroad to provide information about abortions or perform them.

Although organizers said the march was non-partisan, thousands wore Kerry for President stickers.

Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) urged the crowd to help elect John Kerry. Recalling the election of her husband, President Bill Clinton, she noted that the last time such a march was held, in 1992, "we elected a pro-choice president, and this year we must do the same."

Activists said the march was not just about abortion but also about access to health care, family planning and justice.

Holding a wire hanger in front of the crowd, actress Whoopi Goldberg spoke about what she called a generation of women under 30 who don't understand the significance of the hanger--sometimes the tool for illegal back-alley abortions before the Supreme Court's ruling.

"This is what we used," Goldberg said. "But never again will this be the choice of anyone in our hemisphere, in our world. Never again."

Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice, said the vast majority of Roman Catholic women in America support a woman's right to choose.

"We will not put up with religious leaders who tell women they don't have the right to control their own destiny," Kissling said. "Not the church, not the state -- women will control their own fate."

Michelle Williams of Wilmette, Ill., joined her mother, Lenore Zake of Palm Beach, Fla., at the march. The women, in homemade "Freedom" shirts, attended an ACLU-sponsored breakfast for Illinois activists Sunday. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) received a standing ovation after she addressed the large crowd.

"We are marching as if our lives depend on it because they do," Schakowsky said.

Williams, a middle-school art teacher and mother of two daughters, said women deserve the right to make decisions about their families.

Williams, now 52, had an abortion when she was 28. She said it was the right decision for her at the time, and she supports the right of other women to make the same decisions.

"Unwanted children breed criminals and other problems in our society," Williams said.

As the activists made their way from the kickoff breakfast to the Mall, they were met by about 200 counter protesters.

Brandi Swindell, the national director of Generation Life, said the post-Roe vs. Wade generation should stand up for the dignity of life. The group, which does not believe in the use of oral contraceptives, said unmarried people should abstain from sex and married couples should use condoms if they want to avoid pregnancy.

"There is no such thing as a safe abortion," Swindell said. "A little boy or girl dies and it is terrible on a woman's body."

Students from Smith College in Northampton, Mass., filled four buses Saturday night, sleeping uncomfortably through the eight-hour trip.

Ashley Barton, a freshman, said some of the students questioned their decision midway through the trip.

"I kept telling them it will be worth it when we get there," Barton said. "And I am really glad we came because I don't think they can really ignore something this size."

The rally's size--estimated at 500,000 to 800,000 by police sources but put as high as 1.15 million by organizers--was in a league with few other demonstrations on the Mall. Among them: the 1995 Million Man March, which drew 800,000, according to independent researchers; a rally after the 1991 Persian Gulf war, which drew about 800,000, and a 1997 Promise Keepers gathering that attracted 480,000 to 750,000.