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## A Quick Sigh of Relief, Now Let's Get to Work Rebuilding Reproductive Rights

The election of Barack Obama heralds at long last a season of promise and opportunity: the chance to improve the lives of millions of Americans and people throughout the world by ending the Bush administration's horrific war on women and making reproductive health a priority for U.S. law and policy. Yet earlier this fall, I said that no matter who won in November, those of us on the front lines of the fight for reproductive rights and health care would have our work cut out for us.

Clearly we have reason to rejoice the recent sound defeat of two state ballot initiatives designed as attacks on *Roe v. Wade* and the California initiative mandating parental notification. These outcomes send an unambiguous message to our elected officials that our government should not interfere with personal and private decisions about our health and families. There is no doubt that backers of the South Dakota abortion ban and Colorado's "personhood" amendment had their sights on the U.S. Supreme Court and overturning *Roe*. The stakes were high not only for women and families in these states, but for women throughout the country.

Fortunately, the voters in South Dakota, Colorado and California have made it clear that they put the health, safety and privacy of the women in their states first, above abortion politics. Proponents of both of these measures would be wise to follow the electorate's wishes and put these issues to rest.

But even with these victories, and even with this election, individual state legislatures remain dangerous arenas in which we struggle to preserve every woman's rights to choose whether or not she will bear children, and to have the broadest access to contraception, abortion, health information and pregnancy care. Every year, our opponents introduce more than 600 anti-choice measures in the states. Just last month in Oklahoma, the Center for Reproductive Rights filed suit immediately to block a law that would force a woman to listen to a doctor describe an ultrasound image of her fetus. And, in a bizarre Alice through the Looking Glass twist, the same law would prevent a woman from suing if her doctor intentionally withholds other information about the fetus, such as severe abnormalities. Fortunately, we won an order temporarily blocking the law while we prepare for trial.

We know that this coming January will be equally bad or even worse as our opponents rush to take advantage of the Bush administration's dangerous judicial legacy: the current Supreme Court and President Bush's judicial appointees, which make up more than one-third of sitting federal judges and the most conservative in modern history.

We have suffered under the yoke of an administration that has suppressed science to the detriment of health and has done damage to constitutional and human rights values. Federal court decisions have undermined the protections established by *Roe v. Wade*, funding for basic reproductive health care is inadequate and maternal mortality rates among women of color remain shamefully high. At the U.N., the United States has undermined protection for reproductive rights and health, and restrictions that the U.S. places on foreign assistance hamper rather than promote progress. All this flies in the face of the United States' historical role as a world leader in championing equality and human rights and of supporting access to essential reproductive health care around the world.

In sharp contrast to the erosion of protection for reproductive rights in U.S. law, the global trend within United Nations', regional and national jurisprudence has been towards recognition of reproductive rights as human rights. Recent decisions by the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the European Court of Human Rights have found that denying women abortions in certain circumstances violated human rights guarantees. In addition, in the last twenty years, 16 countries have liberalized their abortion laws. At a time when the world is moving towards greater recognition and protection of these rights, the United States should also be advancing and not retreating.

Our new administration must take quick and decisive action to create a policy climate guided by science and not ideology, starting with striking funding for abstinence-only sex education and the appointment federal agency directors -- beginning with the FDA -- who respect scientific data. President-elect Obama must appoint federal judges committed to constitutional rights and the objective review of evidence. The U.S. must once again support reproductive rights at the U.N. and in U.S. foreign assistance programs by repealing the Global Gag Rule and restoring funding to the United Nations Population Fund. And we must ensure that our nation is represented around the world by people who respect women's human rights.

Now that a pro-choice administration is about to move into the White House, it may be tempting to think that we no longer have to "worry" about women's reproductive rights. But we must resist that temptation and instead pledge to seize this moment to make sure that this most fundamental and enduring principle is enshrined in law: *At the heart of a free society is our ability to form the personal beliefs and make the intimate decisions that chart our destinies and define who we are.*