

Planned Parenthood, civic leaders mark 40 years of Roe v. Wade

by Gretchen Rachel Blickensderfer
2014-01-24



Durbin and Quinn

[CLICK HERE to See Additional Photospread](#)

In 1971, two years before Roe v. Wade, abortion was legal for 10 days in Illinois. The late Dr. Marvin Rosner performed the first legal abortion in the state. After a federal court overturned a law banning first-term abortions, one of Rosner's patients asked him for the procedure.

On Jan. 23, more than four decades later and on the 40th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision, Rosner's wife, June, braved the freezing temperatures and a small gathering of protestors outside of the Bottom Lounge in Chicago in order to join Planned Parenthood Action Illinois (PPIA) to mark the anniversary of the legal decision.

Rosner was joined by the board, staff and supporters of PPIA along with a who's who of Illinois civic leaders, including Gov. Pat Quinn and U.S. Dick Durbin.

In remembering the repercussions to her husband in 1971, Rosner told Windy City Times: "He was threatened. They painted a swastika on his hospital. The opposition called in the middle of the night claiming to be from the

butcher's union. I was so proud of him, but it was really scary. I was worried for my children and I was worried for him."

According to PPIA President and CEO Carole Brite, the organization is about keeping women and families healthy. "We are the biggest preventer of the need for abortion," she told the WCT. "So we invite our opponents to come and join us in offering effective birth control."

WGCI radio personality Loni Swain kicked off the event by introducing PPIA Vice President for Public Policy and Education Pam Sutherland. "Tonight we have a lot to celebrate," Sutherland said. "What if we lived in a state like Texas? They refused to take 30 million dollars in federal funding just to let cowboy Gov. Rick Perry keep Planned Parenthood from getting one penny to provide birth control."

On the stage behind Sutherland was a line of who she termed "champions for women's health." They included Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle; U.S. Reps. Jan Schakowsky, Mike Quigley, Robin Kelly, Brad Schneider and Bill Foster; Durbin; Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon; state Sens. Heather Steans, Michael Frerichs, Toi Hutchinson and Dan Kotowski; and state Reps. Barbara Flynn Currie, Scott Drury, Robyn Gable, Greg Harris, Camille Lilly, Sara Feigenholtz and Dan Williams.

"Here is why we're going to win," Schakowsky said, referring to statements by Republicans like Mike Huckabee who she claimed had said that women could not control their libidos without the help of government. "Women all over this country aren't going to take the kind of disrespect that comes in words and in legislation. We're going to mobilize those women and, starting in 2014, we're going to take back our bodies and our congress."

Preckwinkle reminded the audience of the "national and state efforts to turn back the clock and take our rights away." She added that standing up for access to reproductive health care is not easy. "But some elected officials are ready to step up and do the right thing," she said. To that end, she presented the Richard J. Phelan Profile in Courage Award to Lilly for being the chief house sponsor of legislation that requires public school sexual health education classes to be complete, medically accurate and age appropriate. "It took three years," Preckwinkle said. "Despite outrageous and unfounded accusations about what the legislation might do, Representative Lilly remained committed and shepherded the bill through the house in May of last year."

In accepting the award, Lilly thanked PPIA and her colleagues. "The smile that you see on my face is the joy that so many people are receiving today knowing they have information to help them make better decisions," she said.

Off stage, Lilly remembered her fight for the bill. "It was a challenge," she said. "I had no idea that something that seemed so common sense to me, like education and information for young people that empowers them to make better decisions, would be so difficult."

Brite honored Lilly for her courage. "It is looking fear in the eyes and saying 'get the hell out of my way,'" She asserted. Brite denounced political challengers to both Lilly and the activities of the PPIA. "They are that special kind of politician we call 'gynoticians,'" she said. "Every time one of these gynoticians makes inaccurate statements about women's health, we will be there to call them out."

Brite presented the Dr. Marvin Rosner Award for Lifetime Achievement to Durbin. "He stood up on the floor of the senate and spoke out in support of Planned Parenthood," she said. "He told our patient's stories. He explained to his colleagues what it would mean to the women of Illinois and the teens of Illinois if Planned Parenthood were to be defunded. He will do everything in his power to preserve the right of women to access affordable, preventive health care."

Durbin remembered Emily Taft Douglas, the first woman Democrat elected to the Illinois Congress and author of the 1969 biography of Margaret Sanger who opened America's first birth control clinic in Brooklyn, N.Y. In 1921, Sanger founded the American Birth Control League, which later became Planned Parenthood. "I reflect on what Margaret Sanger did," Durbin said. "Arrested many times, a woman who understood what the dangers were. She was a nurse who wanted to make sure that other women would have choices in their lives. Planned Parenthood is here today and your support of it continues in that great tradition: empowering women, educating women and families on reproductive health."

Outside of the Bottom Room, Durbin's detractors claimed that he should know better. "We're here to protest the

nation's largest abortion chain, responsible for over 300,000 abortions every year," said Executive Director of the Pro-Life Action League Eric Scheidler. "Planned Parenthood's abortion business is growing and growing while their other services are all going down."

But Durbin had an answer for them. "Thank God we live in a country where people can peacefully express their views," he said. "But if you want to reduce the number of abortions, then reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies. If you want to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies, don't try to defund the good work being done by Planned Parenthood."

Off-stage, Durbin told WCT that more women in elected office is essential. "Their voices give a perspective which many men don't have," he said. "I think that the emergence of more women in the senate, in the house and in legislatures is a positive development. I have found most of my values line up pretty well with progressive women and we have great coalitions. They have been allies for the causes I believe in."

The event was capped off courtesy of an appearance, via Skype, of Saturday Night Live alum and National Board of Planned Parent Advocates member Jane Curtin. "It seems as though the other voices are getting very loud," she said. "Todd Akin talking about how we can miraculously shut down when we are being raped and we won't get pregnant. It kind of makes us like a crime stopper or a super-hero."

Curtin cautioned the audience that with people, like Akin, demanding to take women's rights away, the honest truth must be told about women's health. "They believe that they're the ones who can speak for you," she said. "They can't. They are lacking empathy and they are lacking information."

For more information about Planned Parenthood Action Illinois, go to www.ppiaction.org .

—

Source: <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/Planned-Parenthood-civic-leaders-mark-40-years-of-Roe-v-Wade/45980.html>