

The CHAIRMAN. I thank you very much. I must tell you it is obvious I argued before the Supreme Court. You are the only one in the last 74 days that came in under the 5 minutes. Thank you very, very much.

Ms. Michelman.

STATEMENT OF KATE MICHELMAN

Ms. MICHELMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator Thurmond. I very much appreciate the opportunity to talk with you today.

Senator THURMOND. Speak into your machine, if you could, just a little bit louder.

Ms. MICHELMAN. My machine. I always have an aversion to machines.

I thought very long and hard about the focus of my testimony today. During this process, I think we must remember a very simple truth: What is decided here will profoundly affect the lives of millions of Americans outside this hearing room—Americans who depend on you to protect their most cherished rights and liberties. Among them are the countless desperate women who, prior to *Roe v. Wade*, were deprived of their privacy, their dignity, and even their health and their lives. Millions of Americans know firsthand that when we get past constitutional theory, legal precedent, and Court rulings, this confirmation process will determine whether millions of women will be forced, terrified and alone, to face one of the most difficult crises of their lives.

Mr. Chairman, today I must tell you that I was one of those women. I was relatively lucky. I was able to avoid resorting to the back alleys. But I suffered the shame, degradation, and humiliation of being deprived of my right to make one of the most important decisions of my life.

Like most women in this Nation, I never expected to need an abortion. Most women do not. But before *Roe*, I faced the trauma of a crisis pregnancy. I was raised Catholic, married young, and as a young woman I had three wonderful daughters in 3 years. But in 1970, my husband suddenly announced that he was leaving me and the children.

I was devastated. Without money, a job, or a car, I was even unable to get a charge account at the local five-and-dime because I was not married any longer. I was also very ill at the time. My self-esteem was destroyed. My entire world was shattered, and my family was forced onto welfare.

Almost immediately after my husband left me, I learned that I was pregnant. With three children under the age of six, I alone had to meet their every need—financial, emotional, and physical. The very survival of my family was at stake. Indeed, my family was at risk of being split apart.

Because abortion was largely illegal at the time, I had to struggle with this decision all by myself, all alone. Deciding whether or not to have this abortion was probably one of the most difficult and complex decisions of my life. It challenged every religious, moral, and ethical belief I had. But I looked into the eyes of my three daughters and made what I think was one of the most moral decisions I have ever made.

It was at this point that I became painfully aware that having another child would have made it absolutely impossible to cope with an already desperate situation. I am certain that my family would not have survived intact.

But in 1970, you know, the Government did not allow me to make this decision for myself. I was forced to appear before a hospital-appointed panel of four men. These complete strangers cross-examined me about the most intimate and personal details of my life. It was humiliating. I was an adult woman, a mother of three, and yet I had to win their permission to make a decision about my family, my life, and my future. And I alone would have to live with the consequences of their decision.

But, finally, they granted me their permission. I was admitted to the hospital. Yet as I awaited the procedure, I was told by a nurse that they had forgotten one more legal requirement.

I would not be able to have the abortion without written permission from the man who had just deserted me and my children. I literally had to leave the hospital and find the man who had rejected me and ask his permission. It was a degrading, dehumanizing experience, an assault to my integrity, my dignity, and my very sense of self.

At all times during this process, I carried with me the phone number of an illegal abortionist. And if at any juncture I was thwarted in my attempt to have a hospital abortion, I was prepared to break the law and risk my life because my family's survival depended on it.

Mr. Chairman, Senators, perhaps now you can begin to understand the pain and anger I feel when I hear the right to choose dismissed as a mere single issue. This right is absolutely fundamental—fundamental to our dignity, to our power to shape our own lives, to our ability to act in the best interests of our families. No issue—none—has a greater impact on the lives and futures of American women and their families.

The record shows that, if confirmed, Judge Thomas would indeed vote to take away this fundamental right—to take this Nation back to the days when women had no alternative but the back alleys for health care. What happens in the halls of Congress must reflect what is in the hearts of the American people. This may be one of the last opportunities you have to stand up for a woman's fundamental right to choose before *Roe v. Wade* is ultimately overturned. I urge you to refuse to confirm Judge Thomas.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Michelman follows:]