

'This is not a drill'

The stakes are high for women's reproductive freedoms, warns Ilyse Hogue, leader of NARAL Pro-Choice America

BY EMILY GREEN
STAFF WRITER

Before a national television audience, Ilyse Hogue took the stage on the third night of the 2016 Democratic National Convention and did the unthinkable – she spoke publicly about her abortion.

Her words struck a chord. Abortion remains a highly divisive social issue that carries with it a stigma long felt by the millions of American women who have chosen to terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

Hogue's unapologetic proclamation that evening sent those women a message: You don't have to be ashamed.

A fourth-generation Texan and respected progressive activist, Hogue took the helm at NARAL Pro-Choice America after working as a senior adviser at Media Matters for America, a nonprofit dedicated to monitoring, analyzing and correcting conservative misinformation in the media. She has also held senior positions at Rainforest Action Network and MoveOn.org.

As president at NARAL Pro-Choice America, Hogue, 47, oversees a national organization with affiliates in 22 states striving to protect and advance women's reproductive freedom through political action including lobbying and advocacy.

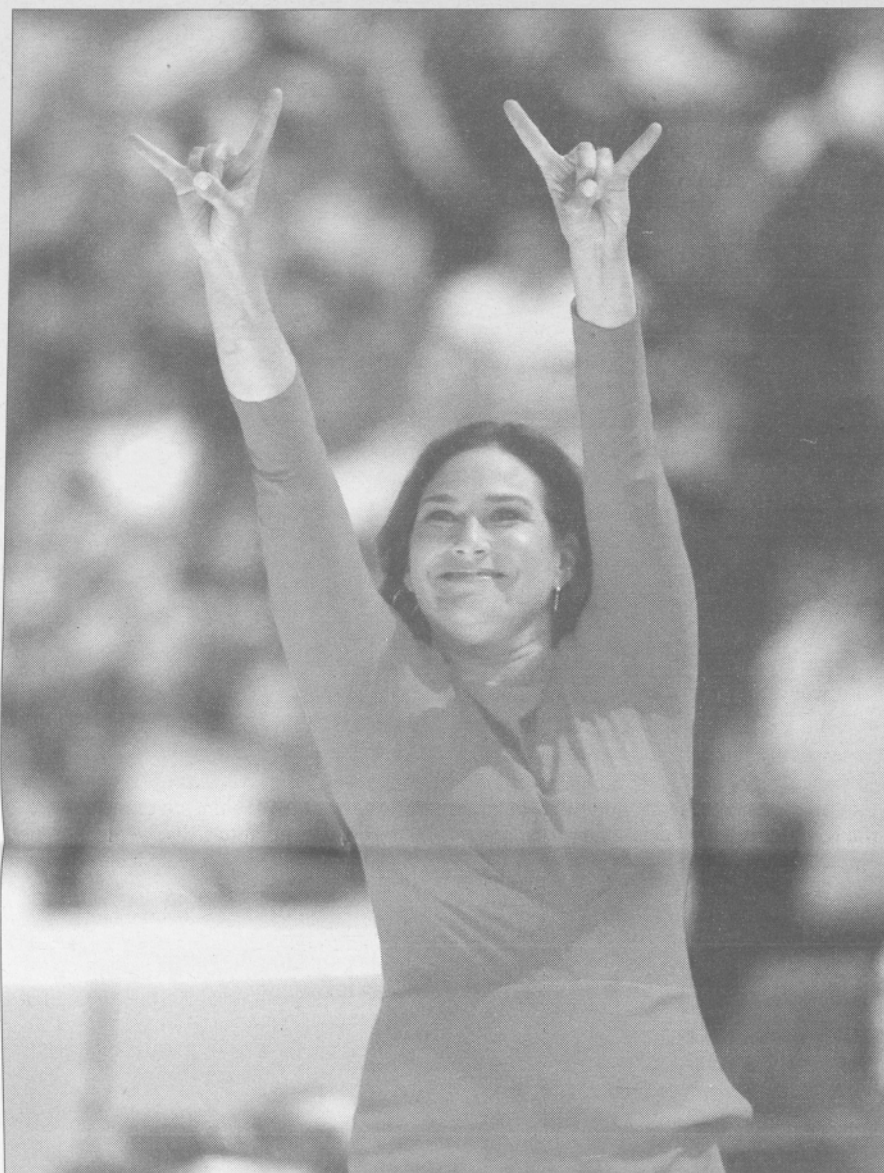
On Sept. 30, she will give the keynote address at NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon's annual luncheon fundraiser at the Sentinel in downtown Portland.

Street Roots spoke with Hogue in advance of her Portland visit. We wanted to know about her decision to share her abortion story at the DNC and the current state of women's reproductive rights in America.

Emily Green: *In a move that's been called both radical and historical, you began your speech at the Democratic National Convention by talking about your own experience with abortion. What factored into your decision to reveal something so personal and so stigmatized on national television?*

Ilyse Hogue: Well, it definitely was never on my top 10 list of things that I wanted to do in my lifetime, but what motivated me was pretty simple: The stakes are high – higher than they've ever been in my lifetime. Around this election particularly, when it comes to reproductive freedom and reproductive justice. So, the stakes were high and I had a stage, and millions of women who have shared this experience with me did not.

It felt like a time to say to the country, "I will not be ashamed by sharing my real life experience" and demanding that we elect people into office who will work to create



Ilyse Hogue, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, leaves the stage after speaking July 27 at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia. In her DNC speech, Hogue talked about her own decision to have an abortion.

PHOTO BY GARY CAMERON/REUTERS

policy that reflects the lived experience of so many women in this country.

E.G.: *What has the response been like?*

I.H.: The response was overwhelmingly wonderful and reaffirming. My existence, since I took this job, generates negative response on a daily basis, so of course that was present, but actually not more than usual. The small but very, very vocal extremists on the other side were definitely drowned out in the wake of my speech by the number of people who thanked me and supported me online for putting myself out there.

I would say the thing that made it all feel worth it was the following week, when a young woman posted on a very popular mom's blog, called Scary Mommy, her own story about her own abortion experience and in that said that she was motivated by my speech, but also came out as a pro-choice Republican who had been living in shame for years because of what she was taught to believe, and that she no longer

wanted to live in shame. That made me feel like it was all worth it.

E.G.: *In the 43 years since Roe v. Wade recognized a woman's constitutional right to obtain an abortion, have the protections granted therein ever been more in jeopardy than they are today?*

I.H.: I don't think that they have been, but I have not been around that long (laughs) so there may be others of a different generation that felt like it was equally as perilous at different times.

We're at the zenith of what the anti-choice movement has – the strategy that they've been employing for four decades since Roe v. Wade passed. They have been thinking about nothing else but repealing those rights ever since, and they've done a very good job, objectively, of employing a long-term strategy that allowed them to take over state legislatures and help re-district so Congress reflects the minority opinion that they are. And they've worked really hard to get judges elected.

I think they've thrown everything they have at the wall, and unfortunately, too much of it has stuck in too many states. Oregon actually stands out as sort of a paragon of virtue as far as these rights are concerned, but I'm from Texas, and I can tell you we're at the other end of the spectrum.

We've got a presidential election where not only do we have one side of the equation running on misogyny and outlawing all of the advances, specifically abortion access and rights to make our own decisions, but also just misogyny – just running on the idea that women are inferior. On the other side, you've actually got not only the first shot we have at having a woman in the White House, but a woman who understands that when you centralize women's well-being in policy, that we *all* do better. So, you've got that ticket, and then you've got the winner being able to choose a number of Supreme Court justices, most likely, in the coming years. Therefore, we've got a convergence of opportunity and crisis.

Clinics are closing all over the country, women are being – in some cases – it's certainly vilified and rare – but important cases – imprisoned for taking matters into their own hands, and on the other side you have the opportunity of actually marching forward into the future where we have policies that reflect real women's lives.

I can tell you in *my* lifetime, there has never been a more important election with regard to the issues that we care so deeply about.

E.G.: *Speaking of the election, Trump's running mate, Mike Pence, is a staunch opponent of women's reproductive freedom. If he does get into the White House, how will that change NARAL and other women's rights groups' offensives, and do you think it could actually mean a reversal of Roe v. Wade?*

I.H.: I do. I think Trump has certainly said that Pence would be the most powerful vice president ever when it comes to these issues, and Pence has done everything Trump has said he wanted to do.

Trump said he wanted to defund Planned Parenthood. Pence has done it (in Indiana) at great cost to Indiana residents.

Trump, in a moment of clarity, said that he would punish women who had abortions. Purvi Patel (was convicted of feticide and sentenced to 20 years in prison) on Pence's watch in Indiana for having a home abortion.

Trump has said he would punish doctors. Mike Pence, as governor of Indiana, has signed into law one of the most extreme bills ever that could send doctors to jail for performing certain abortions.

(In March, Pence signed a measure that prohibited women from obtaining an abortion based on the race, gender or disability of the fetus, and also holds doctors liable for wrongful death if they perform an abortion based on one of those prohibited reasons.)

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This is real life, and I think that Mike

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