

RICHARDS, from page 4

Parenthood for affordable birth control and cancer screenings, and even tried to strip away maternity care benefits. Not only that, they've taken steps to allow employers to deny birth control coverage to their employees, undermined programs that prevent teen pregnancy, rolled back protections for transgender people and survivors of sexual assault, stacked the administration at every level with people who are radically anti-science and anti-abortion.

The unintended consequence, however, is that these attacks have energized and engaged millions of people across our country who are fighting back. I hope that will be the lasting legacy of this moment: the activism and grassroots organizing it has inspired.

J.Z.: So many of the battles against Planned Parenthood and other women's health access points have been projected through the lens of abortion, when these are matters of complete health care for women, particularly women experiencing poverty. After a century, we're still fighting for health care and reproductive rights. What do you want to see happen to get us beyond this cycle?

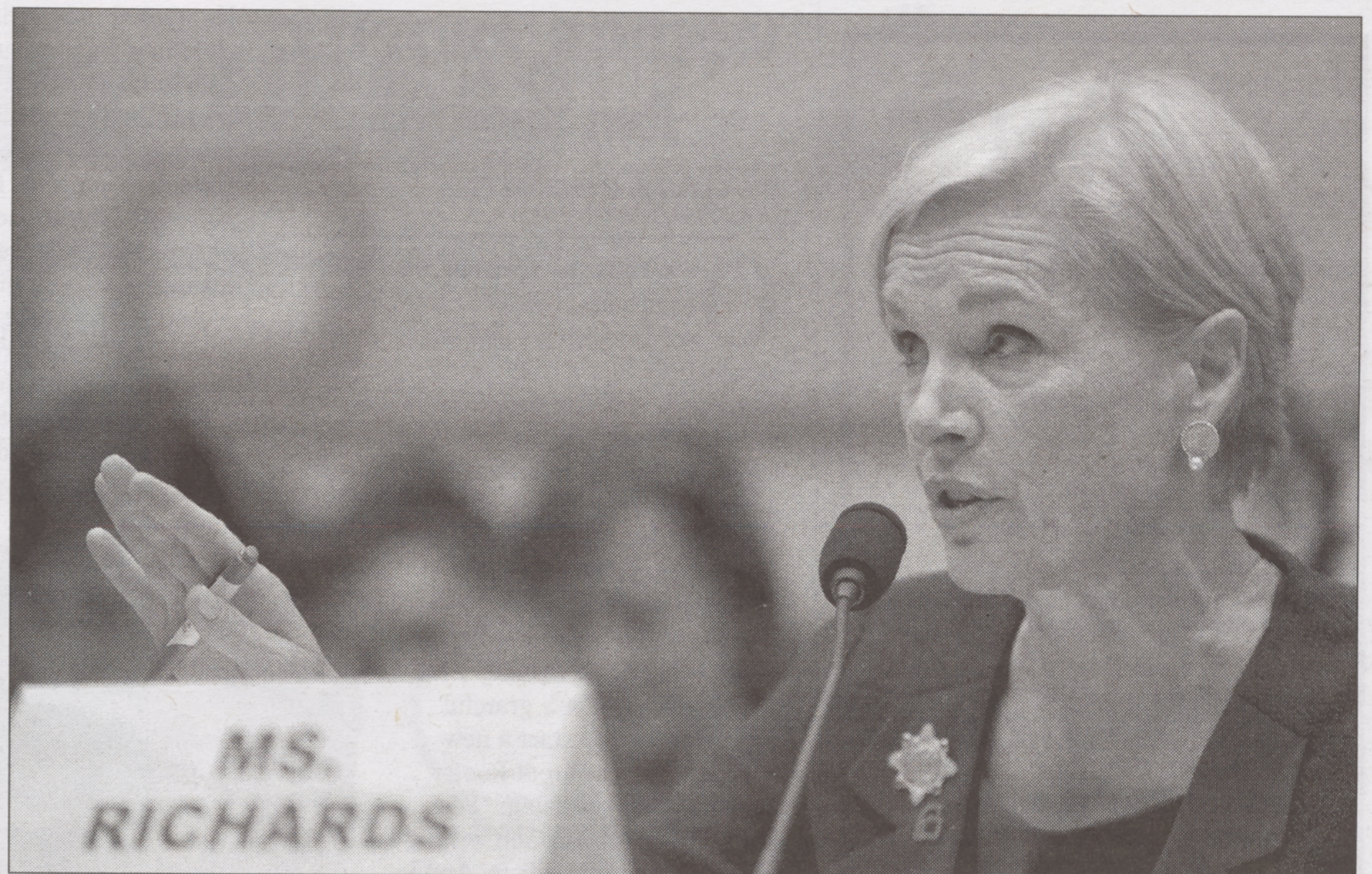
If we've learned one thing over the last year, it is that we can't take anything for granted. It has never been more important to keep pushing forward, and working to expand reproductive health and rights in places like Oregon where we have the chance to keep making progress and provide a North Star for the rest of the country.

C.R.: You are absolutely right. More than three-quarters of Planned Parenthood patients live at 150 percent of the federal poverty level or below. For a lot of our patients, we are the only health care provider they see – without us, there's no one else. In order to get beyond this cycle, I would like to see our leaders in this country recognize that abortion is part of women's complete health care, and to understand that access to reproductive health care is also an

economic issue for millions of women. I'll never forget the student I met in Iowa who told me she was about to become the first in her family to graduate from college, and she was graduating thanks to two things: scholarships and birth control.

J.Z.: I was struck when reading about the young woman, a senior in high school, who said four years ago she was really shy. But after working with Planned Parenthood, she could talk about anything to anybody. And it struck me that the stifling of women's health care, and just the "abnormalizing" of women's physicality and sexuality, has a much more significant impact than just appeasing objections to sexual behavior. What are your thoughts on this?

C.R.: I believe we will never change our politics until we change our culture. That's especially true when it comes to the shame and stigma around women's health and sexuality, which is so pervasive. But the ground is beginning to shift. We are experiencing a groundswell of women speaking out like never before about everything from abortion to miscarriage to sexual assault and harassment. They're challenging people's attitudes and assumptions and normalizing women's experiences. And once that change begins, it can't be reversed. As my mother used to say, you can't un-ring a bell.



REUTERS/GARY CAMERON

Planned Parenthood Federation president Cecile Richards testifies before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., Sept. 29, 2015.

J.Z.: In several instances, you reference cases when people really change their mind about these issues that seem carved in stone – either for or against, around reproductive rights. What is the key to making people see this divisive issue in a new light?

C.R.: Well, for a lot of people in this country, reproductive rights are actually not a divisive issue. Nine in 10 women have used birth control. One in five women have been to Planned Parenthood. For millions of people, this is simply part of life.

When it comes to the issue of abortion, we've found that there is more common ground than it sometimes seems. That's part of the reason why, a few years ago, Planned Parenthood stopped using the labels "pro-choice" and "pro-life." This was a conversation folks in the reproductive justice community had been having for years: If you ask someone whether they identify as "pro-choice" or "pro-life," many say they identify as both or neither. But if you ask them whether they believe a woman should be able to make her own decisions about ending a pregnancy, a lot of people, regardless of their own personal views on abortion, say yes, of course. That's something that has been proven in states like Mississippi, North Dakota and South Dakota, when voters overwhelmingly rejected proposed bans on abortion. People are capable of more complexity and nuance on this issue than we give them credit for.

J.Z.: The section on Dr. George Tiller is particularly moving, especially that he found out later in life, after he went into health care, that his father has been providing abortions for women who had no other options available to them. And they were coming to George hoping to find similar services. (Tiller was murdered while attending church services in 2009.) Can you speak to the message of George Tiller's story?

C.R.: George Tiller was an incredible man, and one of the things that made him so remarkable was that he loved and respected his patients. He understood that they knew

what they needed and deserved the right to make their own decisions about their health, lives and futures. To me, the message of George's story is the same as his motto: Trust women.

J.Z.: You reference in your book a vote, I think in the early 1910s, by the Portland City Council, done in secret to ban the pamphlets on birth control published by Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood. Today, Oregon is viewed as one of the most liberal states when it comes to women's health care access and abortion access, and Portland considers itself ahead of the curve. Meanwhile, other states are curbing access to care. Should we worry, given your experience, that the pendulum could swing back, even in a state like Oregon?

C.R.: Oregon has a long, proud history of activism on reproductive rights. Back in the early 1910s, when the Portland City Council took the vote you mention, the women in town made pamphlets which read, "Shall five men legislate in secret against 10 thousand women?" They were definitely ahead of their time!

If we've learned one thing over the last year, it is that we can't take anything for granted. It has never been more important to keep pushing forward and working to expand reproductive health and rights in places like Oregon where we have the chance to keep making progress and provide a North Star for the rest of the country. That's one of the reasons why I'm so looking forward to coming to Portland on April 10, when Andi Zeisler and I will talk about all of this and more!

J.Z.: You're leaving Planned Parenthood, but I can't imagine you're retiring. What's ahead for you?

C.R.: I'm leaving Planned Parenthood, but I'm definitely not leaving this movement. I'm going to be fighting for reproductive health and rights as one of the 11.5 million supporters. Beyond that? Well, I have this new book coming out ...

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