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The GOP Policy: Making a Woman's Body Illegitimate A View from the Battlefield By Jamala Rogers BC Editorial Board

Dr. Aaronnette White, my dear friend and sister-in-struggle, recently died of an aneurism; she was only 51 years old. A rape survivor and a respected psychology professor, she was a fierce warrior for the reproductive rights of women, particularly African American women.

During the 1980's in St. Louis, Aaronnette organized black women (and some black men) to take out a full page ad in the black weekly newspaper condemning rape in the black community. It was a bold move that pulled the covers off an issue that had rarely received public scrutiny in black communities, leaving many rape victims to suffer in silence.

I was reminded of that campaign and many other community events about rape when Congressman Todd Aiken (MO-R) gave his stunning explanation about rape.

Aiken said, "If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down."

The Aiken comment was a stinging slap in the face of rape victims. Apparently the 32,000 women who become pregnant each year didn't have the magic power to stop their pregnancy. In the U.S., a woman is raped every two minutes and it's still the most underreported violent crime in America, according to the Rape Trauma Services. The underreporting may be linked to the fact that only 25% of reported rapes result in arrest.

VP contender Paul Ryan called the remarks "outrageous" and "indefensible." I found this retort to be quite hypocritical as Ryan (and many others on the far right) share the identical viewpoint. Ryan and Aiken have been co-sponsors of many bills (40 and counting) that are tearing away at the right to a safe and accessible abortion. The last time I looked, abortion was still the law of the land but Republicans are destroying or ignoring laws they don't like while demanding that the 99 Percenters respect the laws that protect the interests of the ruling class.

Last year, nearly 1,000 anti-abortion bills were introduced across the country. The laws have teetered on the absurd, such as forcing women to endure vaginal ultrasounds before abortions or redefining the moment of conception. An Arizona law passed this year declared that pregnancy begins two weeks before conception!

The laws prohibit federal funding of abortion, birth control and other vital services, resulting in the demise of groups like Planned Parenthood. Abortion clinics have been bombed and doctors who performed abortions have been assaulted or killed - acts that have successfully contributed to the Republican strategy to end abortions.

The detrimental bills passed by Republicans have attempted to also redefine rape. In addition to terms like illegitimate rape, they have coined new and confusing terms like "forcible rape" and "consensual rape."

Groups like SisterSong Women of Color for Reproductive Rights have helped launch initiatives such as the Trust Black Women Campaign. The campaign is designed to organize women (and men) to fight for women's right to control their own bodies but also to send a message to the anti-woman camp that attacks on women - whatever form they take-- will not be tolerated.

Although the conservatives holler about getting government out of our personal lives, it seems that women's bodies are the exception to the rule. This brings me all the way back to the work of Dr. White and countless others who have worked tirelessly to educate the general society on the issue of rape, to end the attacks on women's reproductive rights and to protect the personal and psychological security of women. We who believe in freedom and women's rights should not rest until the lives, choices and dignity of all women are fully restored and protected.

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