

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH FRAN DRESCHER

SUBJECT: FRAN DRESCHER, AN AWARD-WINNING ACTRESS, AUTHOR AND COMEDIENNE WHO IS NOW THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT SPECIAL ENVOY FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH, WILL DESCRIBE HER AMAZEMENT AT HER NEW JOB AT A NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON ON APRIL 14.

MODERATOR: DONNA LEINWAND, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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DONNA LEINWAND: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Donna Leinwand and I'm president of the National Press Club, and a reporter for *USA Today*.

We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists. And on behalf of our 3,500 members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and our guests in the audience today. I'd also like to welcome those of you who are watching us on C-Span.

We're celebrating our 100th anniversary this year, and we've rededicated ourselves to a commitment to the future of journalism through informative programming, journalism education, and fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org.

We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards, I'll ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we may have time for as many questions as possible.

For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from our guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheons, and not necessarily from the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From you're right, Mike Coleman, of the *Albuquerque Journal*; Bob Guadian of Media Force PR; Janet Donovan, Creative Enterprises International and a guest of our speaker; Linda Kramer of *Glamour*; Laurie Meadoff, CEO of Cancer Schmancer and a guest of our speaker.

And skipping over the podium, Angela Greiling-Keane, reporter for Bloomberg News and chair of the NPC Speakers Committee. Skipping over our speaker, Kathy Bonk, Communications Consortium Media Center and Speakers Committee member who organized today's event. Thank you very much Kathy. Al Lazar, director of communications and knowledge transfer at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and a guest of the speaker; Kasper Zeuthen of the European Union; Beth Frerking, assistant managing editor for Politico; and finally, Peg Simpson, Washington correspondent for the Women's Media Center, and a former president of the Washington Press Club. (Applause.)

President Obama has pledged to conquer cancer in our time. His first budget includes \$6 billion dollars for cancer research on top of \$10 billion dollars already included in the recent stimulus packages. About 11 million people living in The United States have a history of some form of cancer, including our guest today.

Actress Fran Drescher's own fight against uterine cancer has inspired her to become a leading advocate for women's health. As president of the non-profit, Cancer Schmancer Movement, she has dedicated herself to ensuring that all women with cancer are diagnosed in stage one when it is most curable. She was instrumental in getting the first Gynecologic Cancer Education and Awareness Act passed into law, and is now working with the CDC to use the appropriated funds to best reach all women.

Ms. Drescher is using her, um, uh, *unique* voice and her acting fame to spread the word.

FRAN DRESCHER: What do you mean? (Laughter.)

MS. LEINWAND: Last Fall, the U.S. State Department named Ms. Drescher a public diplomacy envoy for women's health issues, a position that

takes her around the globe speaking to women about taking control of their bodies.

In addition to her advocacy, Ms. Drescher received two Emmy and two Golden Globe nominations for her portrayal of the lovable Ms. Fine on the CBS hit series, *The Nanny*, a show she also created, wrote, directed, and executive produced. She first broke into the acting world with a small role in a 1977 blockbuster, *Saturday Night Fever*, in which she delivered this line to John Travolta: “Are you as good in bed as you are on the dance floor?”

From there, her career as an actor took off. She has co-starred in countless films throughout her career with the likes of Robin Williams, Dan Aykroyd, Tim Robbins, and Billy Crystal. She is also a bestselling author with her first book, *Enter Whining*, and most recently, *Cancer Schmancer*.

Most importantly, Ms. Drescher celebrates nine years of wellness on June 21st, 2009. Please join me in welcoming Fran Drescher. (Applause.)

MS. DRESCHER: Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you everyone. I’m absolutely honored and delighted to be here. I appreciate you all taking time out of your day to attend and hear me speak. I was actually, you know, quite surprised to hear that it’s somewhat of a new occurrence (it’s certainly been in my lifetime) that women are now included in the National Press Club. And I really think that that’s moving everyone in the right direction.

There’s a Swedish proverb that says, “To share happiness is to double the happiness. And to share hardship is to halve the hardship.” So it’s good that the brothers and sisters get along, and continue to move forward, and move mountains.

And I’ve always heard that when the press and celebrity in particular work hand-in-hand, that you can really move mountains. Great and wonderful things can occur. And that has always been my experience. And I’m really-- think that there are many, many mountains yet to climb and much work to be done. So it’s nice when we can combine press and purpose, because it really accomplishes something greater than any individual.

You know, when I grew up, I was a chubby girl in Queens. And if anybody had ever told me that I was going to, you know, grow up and be a victim of a violent crime, and become an international celebrity and become a cancer survivor and get married and get divorced, and start my own organization and then be appointed a U.S. diplomat, I would have thought, you know, just pull the covers over my head and I’ll never get out of bed.

I really can't believe that this is my life. But in fact, it is. And as Eleanor Roosevelt once said, you know, "Women are like teabags. We really never know how strong we are until we're dunked in hot water," so. I learned early in life the lesson of *carpe diem*, seize the day, never regretting not, you know, having to-- not taking advantage of an opportunity. And opportunity knocks all the time. But whether or not, you know, we have the ability, the courage, to, you know, answer it is what makes all the difference.

And I was on a plane to France to visit a friend of mine. I had cashed in some frequent flier mileage and saw the president of CBS, who I had known because I did a short-lived series and a few failed pilots. And so I said, "Jeff." And he said, "Fran." And I ran into the bathroom to put some makeup on. And I'm powdering my face and saying, you know, "Carpe diem. Carpe diem."

And then when I came out, he had-- You know, I had nine and a half hours basically to work this, you know, fortuitous event. And where is he gonna go? Coach? He was kind of a captive audience. And by the end of this nine and a half hours, as we were pulling into Charles de Gaulle, he said, "Okay, when we get back to L.A., you can pitch your ideas for a show." Because I said that-- You know, I was very offbeat. And he was never going to get a script that was going to fit me hand in glove, and that my husband and I, we had good ideas, and that he should hear it.

Eventually, he was the one that described me as a Russell. And I said, "What's that?" And he said, "Well, you've got the curves of Jane Russell, the comic timing of Rosalind Russell, and the tenacity of a Jack Russell." And I thought, wow, this guy really gets me.

And on that trip, I didn't realize that, you know, my good luck was going to continue to happen. But there I was, staying at my girlfriend's house. She had invited me to take a little vacation. And what she didn't include was that she was going to be with her two toddlers. And I, who had never really lived with children, let alone toddler boys, I thought I would lose my mind. You know, when one started crying, then the other one started crying. And when that happened, then I started crying.

And my husband called me from Los Angeles. And he said, you know, Twiggy, the one and only, who I had befriended from that short-lived television series called *Princesses* that I had just mentioned for CBS, called and said, come to London and visit her. And normally, I wouldn't be the type of person that would start changing airline tickets. Because for me, to even get to Europe by myself without my husband was a feat unto itself. I really wasn't comfortable doing things alone back in that day. It's one of the triumphs of my growth as a

woman that I now feel very comfortable living alone and traveling alone, and sitting in a restaurant alone, so.

But then, it wasn't the case. And just getting to my girlfriend's was the accomplishment. But I did re-route my trip. And I did go visit Twiggy in London, because I couldn't stand being with these two toddlers one more minute. And so when I got there, Twiggy and her husband, Lee, were busy working. So I wanted to tour London. And not being comfortable doing anything by myself, I was schlepping her little 12 year-old English schoolgirl around with me.

And the poor kid says to me, "Oh Fran, my new shoes are hurting me." And I'm thinking, you know, we're not going back yet, honey. So I said to her, "Well, sweetie, just step on the backs of them." And she says, "Won't that break them?" And I said, "Break them in." So the poor kid's, like, clumping around, standing on the backs of her new shoes. And I thought to myself, you know, this is kind of a funny relationship, because here I'm supposed to be the adult and I'm supposed to tell the kid what's best for her. And in fact, I'm telling her what's best for me. I couldn't get this out of my head.

So that night, I'm lying in bed and I'm thinking, "Oh, I've got the show that we should pitch Jeff when we go back to L.A." And it's, like, 5:00 in the morning London time, but it's nine hours earlier in L.A. So I called my husband Peter and I said, "What do you think about a spin on *The Sound of Music*, only instead of Julie Andrews, I come to the villa?" And Peter has a very good instinct for these things. He thought for a moment and he said, "That's it. That's the one we're going to pitch to Jeff. We'll develop it as soon as you get home."

And the rest is history. You know, *The Nanny* was formed. We went to CBS and I pitched the idea of *The Sound of Music* only instead of Julie Andrews, I come through the door. They pitched to Jeff, Fran Drescher as the nanny from hell. And a pilot was green-lighted. And we knew when we shot the pilot that we had caught lightning in a bottle. People in the audience didn't really know the story, but yet they knew the characters. And the silhouette was traditional. And somehow it seemed like a Cinderella story. And the character taught everybody that it doesn't matter what you look like or what you sound like; it's what you have in your heart that counts. So that was the big, global message of *The Nanny*. And to this day, it continues to run worldwide in most markets, and has done so for, I guess, 15 years now. So it's really wonderful. I'm very proud of it. I was honored at the Knesset in Israel because the show itself crossed borders that no other entertainment show has ever done.

So, you know, when I went to Jordan, the prime minister said, "I have to take a picture of you because my wife and children will not let me come home unless I have this picture of you." And so, you know, it showed, you know, was a

success in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and very unlikely places throughout the world. And in fact, even here in this country, the network wanted me to write the character Italian. And I thought, you know, I-- I mean, I can play Italian if I really work on it. But with such a fast medium, I didn't want the character to become so broad-stroke that all I'm doing is a lot of "mamma mia" stuff.

And so I said, "No, no, no. I think, you know, that we're going to have to keep the character Jewish. Because then I'll be able to write it very rich in specificity and detail." And they were a little nervous about that, because Italians, seemed like the public liked Italians. And so they felt safe with Italians. Jewish, not so much. And I was really, you know, the first woman on television playing a starring role in a television series, playing a Jewish character.

So it was a little bit gilding the lily, in their minds, you know? Rhoda wasn't actually Jewish, so, you know, you can kind of allow for that somehow. But anyway, I dug my Manolo Blahnik heels into the ground. And we ended up doing *The Nanny* as a Jewish character. And what they thought was that, you know, New York and L.A. and San Francisco and Miami was going to really take to the show right away, but what was going to happen with the Midwest and the Sun Belt?

In actuality, it was just the opposite. The Midwest and the Sun Belt loved that little Jewish girl in short skirts. And it was New York and L.A. that was a little slow on the take, because they were all watching *Unsolved Mysteries*. And then they finally got hip to the fact that there was no end to that story. They're all unsolved, so.

It was in the final year of *The Nanny* that I was beginning to experience symptoms that I couldn't understand or recognize, and certainly didn't feel normal to me. I had fainting between periods. I had extreme leg pain in my left leg, which was something that I recalled Gilda Radner had written about in her book, *It's Always Something*. You know, my stool changed, my breasts became very hard. And I basically went from doctor to doctor. I, you know, entered into a two-year, eight-doctor odyssey in search of a diagnosis.

And I got in the stirrups more times than Roy Rogers. And, you know, every doctor had a different solution for me. My stool changed because I was eating too much spinach. My leg hurt because I had restless leg syndrome, and should drink gin and tonics before going to bed. My breasts were hard because I had the breast of an 18 year-old, which I do. But, you know, there I was with perky breasts in need of roughage, going to bed sloshed in some vain attempt to cure myself.

And I went on four different HRTs, hormone replacement therapies, all being treated for a benign condition that I didn't have, a perimenopausal condition. And doctor number one said that I was too young for a D&C or an endometrial biopsy. And instead of saying, "Well, why? What would that prove or disprove," I was just so thrilled to be too young for anything. So I didn't question her. But, you know, back then, I wasn't a medical consumer. And I didn't know then what I know now, or I would have surely said, "Well, what would that, you know, rule out? And maybe we should disprove cancer before you treat me for a condition that isn't going to kill me."

And I was very, very frustrated because ultimately, I had to get a radical hysterectomy to cure my cancer. Doctor number eight put me on an HRT that has estrogen in it, which made me bleed 24/7. And I called her up. She was doing a talk show in Chicago. The woman has a better career than I do. And I said, "This can't be right." And she said, "Well, it's probably just the wrong prescription. But just as a precaution, we'll get you off it. We'll give you an endometrial biopsy in the office," which is a two-minute test.

And while she was doing it, she was so convinced I had, like, five minutes of fertility. She was still making sure that my boyfriend at the time and myself froze an embryo if I ever wanted to have a biological child. Three days later, she called me up and said, you know, "You have adenocarcinoma. I'm very surprised." And adenocarcinoma is uterine cancer. I fell to my knees and wept because my worst fears had, in that moment, been realized. And because I did my-- I made out my first will, like, two weeks earlier, I started connecting dots that weren't there and thought for sure this is the end of my life.

But as my dear and wise manager and friend, Elaine, said, "Don't connect imagination-- Don't mix imagination with fear. It's a deadly cocktail." And so I just snapped this little rubberband around my wrist every time I started to feel like I was connecting dots that weren't there.

And, you know, a radical hysterectomy is a difficult operation for any woman. But for one who had never had children like myself, it's a particularly bitter pill to swallow. And it was very, very hard for me to deal with the pain of that. And I felt like the cure for my cancer was actually a punishment on top of a punishment. I couldn't wrap my mind around the fact that I was a woman in this life that was never going to be able to experience, you know, childbirth.

And I remember one day, I was feeling particularly down. And I looked at my body in the mirror and it was swollen and black and blue and green and purple, and so misshapen, you know? Where they had made the incision on the pubic bone, there was, like, a cruel red line. Although, I must say, I had the wherewithal to say, "Get me a plastic surgeon to sew me up. And freeze my

ovaries if they're not diseased," both of which things, you know, really have been wonderful that I thought of that.

But anyway, I walked into the bedroom. My boyfriend was, you know, minding his own business, reading a book. And I remember, with my fists, I pounded on his chest, said, "I don't want this to be this way." I didn't feel like myself anymore. I wasn't the superwoman that I had always identified myself with. I was everybody's caregiver. I wasn't the one that got sick. I was the strong one. I was the one that everybody always turned to.

And here, I was the only one that had cancer. And I wished that I could have been anybody in that moment but me. But I was stuck with me. And my cousin, Susan, was coming from Las Vegas that day. My parents were staying with me to help me recover. And Susan arrived and we all sat down at the dining room table. Mom had prepared chicken. She was, like, flitting all over the house, making everything nice. And I could barely lift myself up a single step.

And sitting around the dining room table, Susan was going on and on, talking about how-- the Las Vegas real estate boom (that was, you know, eight and a half years ago) and, you know, her pending divorce, when all of a sudden she starts choking on her food.

And I'd seen someone do this in a restaurant before, so I had recognized it. And she immediately got up, still holding her glass of white wine. And she starts doing this. She can't breathe. And I immediately shift into my superwoman mode. I jump up from the table, without a moment to lose. I get behind cousin Susan, and I start doing the Heimlich maneuver, which is not as easy to accomplish as it was on *The Nanny*.

And I start doing this with her. And every time I do this to her, she's still holding her glass of wine. It splashes across the room. And her little straw hat that she's wearing now flipped over, upside-down on the floor. And all of a sudden, miraculously, a little piece of regurgitated poultry pops out of her mouth.

Well, we all gathered around to look at it. Mom reaches down with a big napkin and picks it up and says, "It's not even that big." And cousin Susan, still gasping for breath, said, "Fran, you saved my life." And I really did save her life. But in a funny way, cousin Susan saved my life, because that day I began to feel like my old self again.

So I started to think, what happened to me shouldn't happen to other people, trying to turn the cancer on its head, trying to make sense out of the senseless. And so in my own tenacious way, I decided that I was going to write a book. And I was going to tell everybody my story. That book became *Cancer*

Schmancer. And when I-- I became a *New York Times* bestseller (I'm proud to say. And when I went on my book tour and I spoke to tens of thousands of people, I realized that what happened to me has happened to many, many, many, many Americans by means of misdiagnosis and mistreatment, and, as a consequence of that, for many, though fortunately not myself, late stage diagnosis of cancers.

And, you know, if everybody that we knew and loved with cancer was diagnosed in stage one, almost everybody would live. And the reason why we lose people we love to cancer is because of late stage diagnosis. So the more I talked to people-- And I was on the lecture circuit after that. People would rush the stage and they'd say, "You're right. Why isn't everybody being diagnosed in stage one? How can I help you?"

Well, I don't know these people. I'm not going to give them all my home number. So I realized that I had to start a movement, that the time had come. The book was not the end, but just the beginning of what was to become a life mission. And I feel like I got famous and I got cancer and I lived to talk about it. So I'm talking.

And I started what became the Cancer Schmancer Movement: Stage One is the Cure. And what we're doing is singularly unique in our voice, because we are not trying to find a cure. We believe stage one is the cure and it's available to us today. And through education, prevention, and policy change, we are going to re-plant the landscape of health in this country so the daughters and sons of tomorrow will live in a world where nobody, ever, would be diagnosed with a cancer beyond stage one. That would be completely unacceptable, and, at the very least, malpractice.

So I feel like the Cancer Schmancer Movement, we're telling everybody to recognize the early warning whispers of the cancers that could affect you so that you can become better partners with your physician to know what tests are available. Because very often, they're not even on the menu at the doctor's office.

Let me tell you something. Doctors are bludgeoned by health insurance companies to go the least expensive route of diagnostic testing. So they usually subscribe to the philosophy, if you hear hooves galloping, don't look for zebra; it's probably a horse. But if you happen to be a zebra, you're going to slip between the cracks. And the last thing you want to have happen is to slip between the cracks when you have cancer.

Very often, cancers, at their earliest and more curable stages, mimic far more benign illness like mine. But the woman with ovarian cancer, which is much more aggressive than uterine cancer, is often misdiagnosed for irritable bowel syndrome. When I meet a woman that says, "I have IBS," I say, "Honey, I hope

that's what you got. But for a minute, step away from your gastroenterologist and go to your gynecologist, and rule out ovarian cancer. Because that is a disease that you do not want to be misdiagnosed about."

Eighty percent of all women with ovarian cancer will find out in the late stages. And over 70% of them will die. And when I watched-- It's what killed Coretta Scott King. And I watched her memorial. And everybody got up to grandstand about the war in Iraq, about the current Administration, about the accomplishments of the Kings. But not one person mentioned what a shame it is in a country as great as ours that a woman like this should have to perish due to late-stage diagnosis of ovarian cancer. And their silence that day spoke volumes to me.

So I began to become basically a lobbyist for women's health issues on Capitol Hill. And that was how the Gynecologic Cancer Education and Awareness Act became realized. It was a bipartisan act. And I marched on Capitol Hill and I sent out emails to ten different senators. I said, "Let's not make this a battle of the balls, because the only one that loses is the ladies." And somehow they responded to me because we managed to pass it by unanimous consent; so all one hundred senators said, "Yes, we will support this bill."

And, you know, I'm not glad I had cancer. And I don't wish it on anyone. But I have to say that I am better for it. And there have been many, many silver linings that have come out of it. This life mission of mine has given me a kind of a resonance to my life and a purpose to my life that I otherwise would not have had. And, you know, I've met people all over the world that have enriched me, including one of my best friends, Melinda, who is also a-- She's an ovarian cancer survivor, stage one. We just celebrated her ten-year anniversary. And it was shortly after my surgery that I was invited to a baby shower. And you've got to understand, I didn't like baby showers when I had a uterus. So, you know-- right-- I really wasn't in the mood to go, but it was, like, a Hollywood party. I wanted everybody to see me alive and well.

And there, I was introduced to her. And the pregnant woman says, "You gotta meet my friend, Melinda. She had the same surgery as you and the same surgeon as you." And the two of us were, like, oh my god. Could this day get any worse? You know, we said our hellos and went our separate ways. But as they were opening up yet one more baby T-shirt that all the women were ooh-ing and aah-ing at, I noticed Melinda couldn't even sit in the room. She was standing in the doorway between the kitchen and the living room.

And I thought, "I gotta talk to this woman." So I got up. I started talking to her. And not only did we have the same surgery and the same surgeon, but she said, "You know, we have-- We were born on the same day, September 30th.

Only you're, you know, two years older than me." And I said, "How do you know?" And she said, "Somebody sent me a birthday card with, you know, birthdays of celebrities on it that's the same as yours." And I said, "And they give the year I was born? Is nothing sacred around here?"

So, you know, that was one of the silver linings, and also to know that no one in this room has a crystal ball. No one knows what the future's going to bring. No one knows what's going to happen five minutes from now. We all make plans to give ourselves a false sense of security, so we can make choices, to shape ourselves towards the future that may never happen. And, you know, on one Wednesday afternoon, when you get side-swiped, and life as you know it changes forever, you have to be able to let go of the plan and play a new one. You're going to feel bad. You're going to cry. You're going to be upset. You're going to say, "Oh, why me, lord?"

But at some point, you have to shake that off, pick yourself up, and play the hand that's dealt you. Play it as elegantly and courageously as you possibly can. Because what you thought was going to be isn't. What is, is. And being mired in, "What if? Why did this happen? Why did this happen to my loved one? I wasn't supposed to have this happen. I wasn't supposed to lose that person," who said? All the Zen masters tell us, "Live in the moment. It's all we have." We're here today. That's what we have to take in and appreciate and understand how ephemeral life is, how fleeting it can be, and at any moment, how it can be taken away from you.

So that was a great life lesson and a huge silver lining. And it has changed the way I live my life today. And, you know, in the last Administration, I had the pleasure of meeting the First Lady. And I felt like, you know, lame duck, schmame duck. I said that to them. You know? I'm an international celebrity with a story to tell. People love me all over the world. And I need to be able to tell this. And I need to be able to tell it as a representative of The United States.

And one thing led to another and I was led towards the U.S. State Department. And I jumped through a lot of hoops to get the appointment that I got. But I'm a good girl, I am. So I managed to jump all the hoops and still get the appointment. And now I'm a public diplomacy envoy for women's health issues. And I'm sent all over, speaking to women and telling them my story, and teaching them to take control of their bodies, to empower themselves with knowledge (because when women are empowered with knowledge, we're unstoppable) to lock elbows. And my vision as a diplomat is to create a 21st Century that is more female friendly and truly the century of the woman.

I believe that at the end of the day, women are sisters living in a man's world. And the commonality that we have far exceeds political or religious

differences. And so we have to join together and lock elbows with the support of our brothers who are enlightened, and create more female friendly societies. And in so doing, I think that we will be able to kind of shift the negative paradigm in the world. Women are the caregivers to the children, the spouses, and the elders in almost every home worldwide. They are every nation's greatest natural resource. And at all costs, we must keep her alive.

So I'm, you know, devoted to seeing that happening. And, you know, as Helen Keller said-- And, you know, I mean, this is the woman that had seemingly, you know, insurmountable odds to conquer. She said, "No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars or sailed to un-chartered (sic) lands or opened a new heaven on the human spirit." So I implore all of you to stay very positive. Because that's the only way that anything is going to change, to take control of your body, recognize those early warning whispers, become better partners with your physicians, join the Cancer Schmancer Movement, and become very proactive.

Because together, we will see change and we will replant the landscape of American health, and remain a beacon for the rest of the world to follow. Thank you so much. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, we've got a bunch of terrific questions here. First one from the audience is, why focus on early diagnosis rather than prevention, or ultimately, a cure?

MS. DRESCHER: Okay. Well, we do focus on prevention. Prevention is very important. And in fact, I just came from a speaking engagement for the Clinical Research Federation. And I do believe that there has to be a lot more money appropriated towards clinical research. Because if we only depend on corporate America to do the research for us, then we're going to get a very narrow view of what needs to be worked on. And it's going to be the one that has the fastest path to somebody's profit margin.

But I, and we at Cancer Schmancer, are interested in knowing if wearing a Blackberry on your belt is giving you testicular cancer or prostate cancer, or if flying coast to coast during the day in a plane at 36,000 feet above the ground, and certainly above the screens of the clouds, that we're getting, you know, enough radiation to equal a chest X-ray, which is true.

So, you know, these are the things that I want to know. I want to know, does diet soda contribute to pancreatic cancer? Who is the one that is going to support something like that? In terms of prevention, right now, you're not going to find a lot of material on the Internet that's going to tell you unequivocally, "Don't do this. Don't do that," if it's going to put some business out of business.

So you have to listen to your inner voice. We are a three-pronged organization — education, prevention, and policy change. That's the road to better health in this country. And in terms of prevention, right now today, walk through your kitchens and bathrooms and see what's there that's not healthy, and get rid of it. Because there are many, many products available now, including the basic (everything old is new again) baking soda and, you know, alcohol and cider and vinegar and all this kind-- I mean, vinegar and all this kind of stuff. So, you know, there's really no excuse to bombarding us with the kind of chemicals that we do.

I tell people all the time, when they're sitting in their cars and they got that GPS things, "Do you know where you're going? If you know where you're going, shut it off. Do you really need that monitor right here at your breasts all day long? What's the point? You don't need it." We sit in front of our laptop. We're, like, we don't even question it because we're almost, like, at the-- we're, like, at the two year-old level of our own evolution. And, you know, it's, like, you know, give us the candy and we're not going to think that the candy may make us sick, because we want the candy. And we want it now.

And we're in a society that's basically capitalism run amok. No longer do companies think, what is the right thing to do? It's just what they have a right to do. So we, as consumers, have to question that. And we put more energy into the buying, selling, and repairing of our automobiles than we do our own body. I don't give anyone power of attorney over my money, so I'm not going to do it over my body either. I shouldn't and neither should you. Listen to your inner voice, because right now, that's your best guide and that's closest to your creator.

MS. LEINWAND: You're asking women to take charge of their lives. Do you have a one-two-three list of how they should start doing this?

MS. DRESCHER: You know, women tend to still subscribe to the Victorian philosophy, if you can grin and bear it, do so because my family comes first. Stop doing that. We're in the 21st Century now. When you put your family first, you're really putting them last, because you're useless to them if you're six feet under. Just like the woman on the plane that decides to put breathing mask on first before her child, you have to do the same. You feel something, doesn't feel exactly right, you can deny it. You can be an ostrich. It'll take you a long time before it levels you. Don't do that.

Get conditioned to thinking, "That feels a little funny. I don't know what it is, but god forbid it's something. I want to catch it in its infancy stage, because I have to be there for my family." You're not being selfish. You're being selfless.

So that's the revolutionary thinking of Cancer Schmancer. That's forcing women to see things through a different lens, very, very important.

And then educate yourself. Don't be intimidated by your doctor. You should go for a second opinion. You should always bring somebody with you to the doctor's office to write down all the answers to the questions that you've already been writing down for the two weeks that preceded arriving at the doctor's office. Make sure the doctor sends you all the papers and forms that you need to fill out rather than do it there when your head is swirling and you've got other things on your mind. Do it in the quietness of your own home when you can figure it out, after everybody's gone to bed. And then when you go, you're all ready for that. And keep writing down all the questions.

And if the doctor says something that you don't understand, ask him to spell it. And if the doctor rushes you, that's not the doctor for you. And if the doctor says, "You don't need a second opinion," or acts like he's, you know, insulted that you would question him, that's not the doctor for you. Because when a doctor calls and tells you, you have cancer, at the end of the day, he goes home and eats dinner with his family, while you go home and eat your heart out with yours. So whose life is it anyway? It's yours. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: Can you tell us about the new Ad Council campaign you are promoting tomorrow in Washington, D.C.?

MS. DRESCHER: I'm very proud to be included in the Ad Council campaign because it's right on message with what we at Cancer Schmancer talk about, which is to become better partners with your physicians. So I think that it's extremely proactive. We are raising consciousness, changing the way people think. Doctors are not gods. They're very busy people. They have their own problems. And really, it's time for us to grow up and learn what there is to learn about our own bodies, and know what your family history is. If, you know, your parents or your siblings have had some kind of a disease, it's likely that you have a better chance of getting it yourself. Know that. Know what tests are available for that. Become more proactive about things like that. Quit smoking. Lose weight. Weight, extra weight, body fat, gives you, you know, much, much higher risk of getting many, many diseases, just by being-- carrying too much weight.

And of course smoking cigarettes — and I used to smoke cigarettes. And it was the hardest thing that I ever did. And I've done some pretty hard things. And it takes, on an average, nine to 16 times for a person to quit. So if you're a smoker out there, and you say, "Oh, I've quit so many times. I give up on myself," don't give up on yourself. Because each time you quit, and then fall off the wagon, you're just getting closer to the time when it's really going to stick. So know that, you know, you're just average. An average person, you know, takes so

many times. And it took me several times. And the last time was the last time. And that was probably, like, you know [mumbles] years ago.

But a great life lesson came out of that experience, because that was so hard to do that everything that happened subsequent to that, whether it be, you know, a man dumping me or getting sick, anything really, I can say to myself, “You know, if I can get over smoking cigarettes, I can get over this man. I could get over the loss of this dog. I can get through this illness. I can do it, because I did that.” And that has been a barometer for everything difficult to follow. So it’s a great, you know, kind of, like, mark, marking point in your life, and something well worth achieving.

MS. LEINWAND: What is the biggest roadblock to detecting cancer at stage one? Is it health insurance companies, Congress, physicians, or something else?

MS. DRESCHER: That’s an excellent question. And there’s never, you know, one reason why this happens. I think that it’s an amalgam of all of the above. I certainly think that health insurance companies are a major culprit. And they have very deep pocketed lobbyists that have the ear of our elected officials, always telling them what their needs are. And unfortunately, medical consumers are not as galvanized and not as forthright. And that’s what we’re trying to change with the Cancer Schmancer Movement.

But I do think that part of the reason why we’re not offered certain tests is because of health insurance companies that really only want to offer tests that are absolutely conclusive, not something that’s going to indicate a problem, but not tell you exactly what it is, and then you have to have subsequent testing to that. To speak to this, you know, directly, we believe at Cancer Schmancer that all women should be offered the transvaginal ultrasound as part of every woman’s basic gynecologic exam. But few women are offered it. In fact, mostly it’s just pregnant women that get the exam.

And women are offered a PAP test because that will tell you whether there are cancer cells in your cervix. Absolutely. But they don’t realize, when the doctor says, you know, “Your PAP test came back normal,” that nothing north of the cervix has been looked at. The uterus and the ovaries are completely on their own, short of a very archaic, bimanual pelvic exam, which was offered in the 20th Century, and I believe in the 19th Century, too. And our exams have not improved since then.

I also tell men, get a transrectal ultrasound. Don’t just depend on that PSA blood test to determine whether or not you have the beginning of prostate cancer. It’s not conclusive. It’s not going to be enough and they will not offer it to you.

You need to ask for it. I tell people, save their Christmas club accounts for tests that insurance will not pay for, because the best gift you can give your family is a long and healthy life. So I think that, you know, our elected officials have to hear what we need, more importantly than what lobbyists for big business need. Because that's not going to be in our best interest. That's going to be in the best interest of their profit margin.

And then I think that-- When I wrote the book, *Cancer Schmancer*, I listed every doctor, not by name, but by number. And I never sued anybody, because frankly, I blamed myself as much as them. I did not do what I should have done. What I apply to in other aspects of my life, I was remiss in. Thank god I still kept going to doctors, you know? I wasn't that blocked. But I didn't do my homework. I didn't get on the Internet to see what these symptoms could mean. I didn't challenge the doctors or ask enough questions. I just kept trying to find somebody, because nobody was really helping me.

But I wasn't really helping myself enough. And I think that that's the difference. And therein lies the rub — we all have to help ourselves more. And, you know, if we make those demands on our elected officials, we will see change. I've met a lot of elected officials. And I've never met one that didn't want to be reelected. So even 20 phone calls in their office, they're, like, "Oh, what's this? What-- ?" You know, then they're suddenly asking their health staffer, "What's this bill I'm getting a lot of calls about?" You know? It's really important.

And we reach out to our members and in different communities, depending on what legislators need to really be approached because of what committees they're on. And we try and reach them through the power of the constituent. And, you know, less than a hundred years ago, the woman did not even have the right to vote in this country. And today, we all need to galvanize and use that vote to get the right to live. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: So about that ultrasound, what would you say to a doctor that tells you it's not necessary?

MS. DRESCHER: You know, I would be very insistent. It doesn't matter that the ultrasound is not a cancer screening tool. Don't tell me that you may find something abnormal and you're going to panic when most of the things that grow in a woman's uterus or on her ovaries come and go, and are usually benign. Because there are too many women that we know that are dying.

So, you know, if this doctor doesn't think that your desire to have a transvaginal ultrasound is necessary, then I suggest that you find yourself another doctor. Because we have a right to know what's going on in our uterus and our ovaries. And it doesn't mean that you rush to go under the knife. It means that if

you see something growing, you can then wait a couple of weeks, see if it's there again. Or you can get-- if it's something resting inside your uterus, you can get an endometrial biopsy, which, again, is an in-office test. You can take a CA-125 blood test which can help indicate whether or not there's an ovarian cancer.

The reason why we're not offered that is because it has a 25% chance of a false positive. So insurance companies don't want to do that because then it means you gotta take another one. You know? It's not a good enough ratio for them. For us, it's a good enough ratio. Because, a), if it doesn't come back positive, okay, then at least I know that. If it comes back positive, then I'll come back in a few weeks and we'll see if the number's dropped down. Maybe it was a false reading. You never know. We don't have to panic. We're not children. We're entitled to know what's going on. And then good medical practice has to be established for what subsequent tests are that take a woman through, all the way to, you know, positive health.

MS. LEINWAND: Our South African audience wants to know if Cancer Schmancer Movement is international. And how is it possible to join?

MS. DRESCHER: We are a global company. And all you have to do is go on www.cancerschmancer.org. That's Cancer S-C-H-M-A-N-C-E-R. It's filled with wonderful information, lots and lots of television interviews that I've done, you know? It's very user-friendly. It's very Fran-nized. It's funny because I'm going to South Africa in August. And I love South Africa. I've been there several times. And I'm going back in August. I'll be working, not only as a representative of Cancer Schmancer, but also as a diplomat and as somebody that is trying to bring focus to global AIDS awareness, and speaking on behalf of AIDS orphans in South Africa.

And also, my new boyfriend is South African, so. I'm going to take him back to his homeland again. But yes, we are all over the world. And we do ask sometimes our members who are from outside of the, you know, United States to sign petitions, pleading with our leaders here in this country to continue to be the beacon that we hope to continue to be as, you know, Americans, and change legislation. Because what we do here is looked at around the world. And we do influence other cultures and societies.

MS. LEINWAND: When you were diagnosed and treated for cancer, how supportive were the Hollywood folks? And how did it affect your career?

MS. DRESCHER: Well, you know, it happened almost immediately. At first, I had to recover. And then after that, I somehow, you know, turned my cancer into a cottage industry. You know? I did a short-- two seasons of *Living With Fran*. But honestly, I feel like I'm standing still when I do work as an

actress, because the pace that I keep as a philanthropist and diplomat is so much more exciting and rewarding to me, even though I don't underestimate or diminish the importance of being able to make people laugh. And I'm very proud of my accomplishments in that.

So I choose what I want to do. And I don't do a lot anymore. But I do do stuff. I was in *Camelot* as part of a Lincoln Center PBS special. And I might be doing a Broadway play this spring. And I'm writing a screenplay right now. I have a third book in my head. And I just turned in a children's book that I wrote. So, you know, I was on *Entourage* this past season as a guest. And so, you know, if it's interesting to me, I'll do it. But for the most part, again, I feel like I got famous, I got cancer. And I lived to talk about it. So I'm talking.

MS. LEINWAND: Celebrities sometimes, often are treated as little more than novelties when they advocate for a cause in Washington, D.C. or testify on the Hill. What's your secret to avoid being trivialized under the D.C. power class?

MS. DRESCHER: Well I think that it's, you know, stick-to-itiveness. You know? A lot of celebrities come and they show up once. And it's great, because it does bring focus to a particular problem. But that wasn't me. You know? I kept coming and coming and coming, and continue to do so. And there was just really not getting rid of me. So it wasn't before long that our elected officials realized that I was a force to reckon with, and I wasn't going away.

And then I think still, being a celebrity, it can be a little bit of a double-edged sword. And so that was one of the reasons why I felt like I wanted to throw my hat in the ring for Hillary Clinton's seat in New York, because I wanted the American public to see me through a different lens and understand what I'm doing and what I'm accomplishing as a women's health activist. And so it's been a very important turning point in my career, because now I'm asked to speak on news shows. That wasn't necessarily what-- You know, I was more doing shows like *The View* and *Conan O'Brien* and *Ellen DeGeneres* and all those shows, giving my message very proudly of taking control of your body.

But now I'm speaking on other shows like *Morning Joe* and, you know, Hannity and Mike Huckabee and Larry King and-- you know? And I feel very privileged to be able to articulate my positions and my opinions on a myriad of subjects. And now I've been encouraged by many people in the general public, as well as Democratic funders and high level elected officials on both sides of the party line to seriously consider running. And so now I have to decide whether or not I want to run. And that would be for 2010 or 2012. And, you know, that's yet to be decided. But I know that I still have work to do as a public diplomacy envoy. And there are things that I need to do for the Cancer Schmancer Movement. And that would take me away from all of that. And I have to really

figure out whether I'm ready to give that up, and then be thrown to the wolves where people are actually going to be, like, disagreeing with me.

MS. LEINWAND: We are almost out of time. But before I ask our guest the last question, I have a few important matters to take care of. First, let me remind our members of our future speakers. On April 16th, we have Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the managing director the International Monetary Fund. He will deliver a special address regarding the world economic recession.

On April 21st, we have Toby Keith, country music star who will discuss his work with the USO and the military, his businesses, and other topics, including his treatment in the media. On April 22nd, we have Thomas Vilsack, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture who will speak at the National Press Club luncheon in recognition of Earth Day.

And second, I would like to present our guest with the coveted and traditional NPC mug.

MS. DRESCHER: Thank you. (Applause.) I'm putting this right next to my Bill Clinton mug with me and my Rosie O'Donnell mug with me.

MS. LEINWAND: For our last question, an audience member says that she can't help admiring the quality of your voice. How did you work to bring it to that perfection?

MS. DRESCHER: You know, whenever I meet people and they say, "Oh, I love your voice," I always look up to the heavens and I say, the spell is not broken. So, you know, when they made my voice, they broke the mold and said, "Feh." But somehow I've managed to make a living with it. And, you know, it's kind of taught me--

I mean, I didn't really-- My parents are often asked by the press, you know, "Did you ever know that"-- You know, I mean, "What was it like when she was a child? What was her voice like?" And my mother, in the exact same voice, says, "We never knew she had a funny voice." But something that, you know, I learned, and we certainly applied it on *The Nanny* was to call it. If you call it first and you make fun of yourself first, then everybody can relax, and they know-- I know what it is. We all know what it is. So let's make fun of it and enjoy it. And I do that with everything in life.

I think that, you know, if we don't take ourselves too seriously and we're a little bit self-deprecating, the world is our oyster.

So that's it. Listen, I just want to thank everybody for, you know, having the patience and taking the time to listen to me speak. I wish you all good health and long life. And, you know, I want to quote Robert Browning because I find this very inspirational, to, "...make your reach greater than your grasp, else what's a heaven for?" Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: Thank you all for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members, Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, JoAnn Booz and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. Also thanks to the NPC Library for its research.

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Thank you and we are adjourned. (Gavel sounds.)

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