

MASLOWSKI: TIME TO BECOME MORE AGGRESSIVE IN ABORTION FIGHT

# Current language of the "choice" movement fails to protect poor women's right to abortion

Approaching Roe vs. Wade's 30th anniversary, Life and Liberty for Women wrote to Kate Michelman, President of NARAL, National Abortion and Reproductive Rights



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Action League, requesting a meeting. We believe it's time to become more aggressive, speaking not from a

"Choice - Who decides?" framework but from a "rights" framework. Sadly, a highly placed NARAL source said, "The establishment isn't going to take the track you're suggesting. It would be a waste of both your and Kate's time to talk and even if Kate were so inclined, which I'm sure she isn't, the Board would never allow it."

William Saletan, *Abortion Wars*, 1998, said the decision not to confront anti-abortion activists in the street was primarily orchestrated by NARAL in the mid-1980's. That was a grave mistake. Unchallenged by the sights of illegal abortion, anti-abortion extremists' baby killing rhetoric and pictures of alleged aborted fetuses have the public feeling shame and guilt about legal abortion, and marginalized abortion providers.

Saletan says NARAL's "Who decides?" conservative message, designed to expand their electoral base by capturing swing voters,

failed to stop abortion restrictions precisely because the message didn't contradict them. "Voters could agree you should be in charge of abortion decisions, without agreeing on whether you meant women or families, teenagers or parents. To conservative swing voters, you meant families and communities." It was a message that could win elections, but NARAL lost control of the message, as the message took on a life of its own. "Swing voters could identify themselves as "pro-choice," while embracing parental involvement laws; an extension of their belief in the sovereignty of families and spurn public funding; an affront to their belief in smaller government."

For example, infuriating many abortion rights supporters during the 2000 Colorado Woman's Right to Know ballot initiative, was the total pandering to swing voters by the abortion rights campaign. The campaign message focused on protecting doctors because polls and focus groups showed that strategy would persuade swing voters. It did, the initiative was defeated.

The initiative clearly targeted doctors as a method of enforcement, making this a valid reason to vote against it, but the initiative's negative impact on the ability of poor women and teens to access abortion had to be absolutely silenced, said the campaign, because swing voters didn't share, as Saletan would describe it, the movement's "concerns about women's rights and

poverty." If abortion rights organizations care about poor women and teens as much as they claim, all arguments in opposition to abortion restrictions would be presented, not just those deemed valid for one variety of voters. The defeat of those restrictions should never be made to hinge upon excluding from the discussion the impact upon poor women and teens.

Rickie Solinger, historian from Boulder, says the language of "choice" has produced a consumerism view of motherhood in which women without financial resources are viewed as lacking the right to be a consumer in the marketplace of motherhood. The "Choice - Who decides?" strategy has failed to protect poor women's right to access abortion, contraceptive services, and motherhood, and facilitated abortion and family planning restrictions and punitive welfare reform. Many Congressional "pro-choice" legislators won't engage in a political fight against nationalizing restrictions the "pro-choice" movement has, in essence, sanctioned with their message strategy, and will capitulate. Losing control of the "Choice - Who decides?" message, NARAL never foresaw that "pro-choice" candidates, capitalizing on their message to attract the same swing voters, would end up, says Saletan, "establishing parental consent laws and prohibitions on tax-funded abortions as corollaries of freedom of

choice." And now, NARAL is changing their name to, of all things, NARAL Pro-Choice America.

We agree with Saletan. If the abortion rights movement intends to "demand not just privacy but public access and equality, it can no longer rely on the old message." Life and Liberty for Women will speak honestly about what legal abortion is: it kills pre-viable human life, but pre-viable human life has no right to life over a born woman. We'll challenge anti-abortion extremist pictures of alleged aborted fetuses with graphic images of illegal abortion's impact upon women and families, and challenge the idea that God condemns legal abortion. Our supporters say they're glad we've had the courage to say what we've said, the way we've said it.

Mainstream abortion rights organizations should know many supporters are terribly frustrated with them, and in a show of no confidence, are now resigned, even ready for illegal abortion, which they believe will wake the complacent and replace arrogant, entrenched messengers and their failed sugar-coated "choice" language and "Who decides?" message strategy that was co-opted and corrupted, with a new aggressive, pro-active, rights message that would leave no woman behind.

**Julie Maslowski is a member of the Board of Directors of Life and Liberty for Women.**