

Fort Collins Coloradoan 1-22-03

Topic: Roe vs. Wade anniversary

## Abortion rights need strong defenders

Approaching the 30th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade, Life and Liberty for Women wrote to Kate Michelman, president of National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL) and requested a meeting. It's time to become more aggressive; speak 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 even if Kate were so inclined, which I'm sure she isn't; the board would never allow it."

William Saletan in "Abortion Wars" (1998) said the decision not to confront anti-abortion activists in the street, was primarily orchestrated by NARAL. That was a grave mistake. Unchallenged by images 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 win swing voters, failed to stop abortion restrictions because it did not 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. 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



**Julie Maslowski**  
Soapbox

to their belief in smaller government." Most infuriating for 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.

Protecting doctors from harassment resonated with swing voters, defeating the initiative but the initiative's negative impact on the ability of poor women and teenagers to access abortion had to be silenced, said the campaign, because swing voters, as Saletan would describe it, "didn't share the movement's concerns about women's rights and poverty."

Rickie Solinger, a historian from Boulder, says the "choice" language produced a consumerism view of motherhood in which women who lack financial resources are viewed as having no *right* to be partakers in the marketplace of motherhood.

It's failed to protect poor women's *right* to access abortion, contraceptive services, and motherhood, facilitating abortion and family planning restrictions and punitive welfare reform.

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. NARAL never foresaw that "pro-choice"

candidates, capitalizing on its "Choice-Who Decides?" message strategy to attract the same swing voters, would end up, notes Saletan, "establishing parental consent laws and prohibitions on tax-funded abortions as corollaries of freedom of choice."

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

Saletan is correct. If abortion rights organizations intend to "demand not just privacy but public access and equality, it can no longer rely on the old message." Life and Liberty for Women articulates a woman's *rights* message speaks honestly about what legal abortion is, challenges anti-abortion extremist pictures of alleged aborted fetuses with graphic images of illegal abortion's impact upon women and families, and challenges the idea that God condemns legal abortion.

Supporters say they're glad we've had the courage to say what we've said, the way we've said it.

Mainstream "pro-choice" 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, believing it 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 board member of Life and Liberty for Women.