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From Buttons to Blockwalking: A Day in the Life of an NPCT Intern

By Fatima Bhuriwala, Electoral & Legislative Intern

One of the perks of working at NARAL Pro-Choice Texas is unlimited access to cute buttons that say, "I ♥ Pro-Choice Boys." I had no idea how great a response I would get: walking to class, on the bus, at cash registers, at the mosque... The other perk of course is the immense satisfaction of doing my part in defeating the forces that threaten our control over our own bodies and minds.

Of course the list of benefits that I as a legislative intern get does not end there. As an undergraduate Government/History major contemplating a career in law, I get a first-hand knowledge of both good and bad laws, the absence of any laws on issues where they are so desperately needed, and bills that one day might become laws. And while I can see the success of good laws helping out people, I also get to see where the law has fallen woefully short of serving the people.

NARAL Pro-Choice Texas' *Healthy Women, Healthy Families* project readily comes to mind. It is no wonder then that I got frustrated when after entering countless surveys that underlined the need for "medically accurate sex education" for instance, I heard that the

first bills filed for hearing in the upcoming legislative session mentioned not one of these pressing concerns but instead called for "pro-life" license plates! I still have many more surveys to enter, by people from all over Texas, and not one of them has indicated any need for a "pro-life" license plate!

But not all is lost. Thankfully we have some great people on our side. Some of these are the folks at Whole Woman's Health here in Austin. The other interns and I took a tour of this clinic two weeks ago. And imagine my surprise as I walk in... expecting to see cold steel countertops in an oppressively sterile environment, I am instead met with the most comfortable-looking clinic I have yet been to. And yes, while some of the rooms did have the dreaded steel countertops, the environment was anything but cold. It was warm and inviting, like our reception there. Though my favorite part of the clinic was how each room was named after an important female personality, I was not untouched by the feeling of safety and comfort that also permeated from the clinic. The manager informed us about the procedures and how at every stage, patients are counseled, so they don't feel alienated at one of the most agonizing stages of their lives. And while the experience was powerful and sad, it was also hopeful.

And in a way, hopeful is a term that aptly describes my experience here at NARAL Pro-Choice Texas; I am hopeful that not only my work this semester to support our endorsed candidates (such as block-walking, research and a hundreds of phone calls) has made some difference, but also that later on my experience here will be a great first step towards the path that I want to take: providing legal assistance to women about their reproductive rights in Third World nations.



Interns Yoona, Fatima, and Morgan take a field trip to Whole Woman's Health clinic in Austin.



NARAL Pro-Choice Texas Foundation is a proud member of Community Shares of Texas. To learn more about donating to NPCT Foundation through workplace giving, visit www.CommunitySharesTX.org or call (800) TX-SHARE.

Thanks for a Great Celebration of Choice!



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Letter from the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

Well, we did it! After a VERY long electoral season, hours of phone-banking, miles of block-walking, numerous hours dedicated to registering new voters, and then getting out the vote, I'm thrilled to offer congratulations to NARAL Pro-Choice Texas PAC's endorsed candidates:

- ◆ Kristi Thibaut – newly elected State Representative for HD 133
- ◆ Diana Maldonado – newly elected State Representative for HD 52
- ◆ Valinda Bolton – re-elected State Representative for HD 47

Please also remember that there is a run-off in Senate District 17. Early voting will be held December 8-12, with the election on Tuesday, December 16. If you live in SD 17, don't forget to vote!

After taking a brief breather, we're back in "go" mode, ramping up to the start of the next legislative session in January 2009. Unfortunately, we know that despite the victories we helped achieve during the election, we're still going to be fighting an uphill battle this time around. Several anti-choice bills have already reared their ugly heads and we expect to see more in the coming weeks.

With that said, we are so thankful to have a new face around our office. Please help me welcome Blake Rocap. Blake will be serving as our Legislative Counsel during the 81st session. With a law degree from Texas Tech and years of experience working on reproductive rights, judicial bypasses, and a range of progressive issues, we know that Blake will use the experience he gained working at the Capitol to ensure we gain some ground this spring.

Yes, the latter part of 2008, especially, has been filled with exciting energy and we all look forward to what 2009 will bring as well. The wind is at our backs and we can't wait to see what's next. Whatever it is, though, please know that we couldn't do it without you. Your tireless support is what makes everything we do possible and for that, we can not thank you enough.

Happiest of holidays to you and your loved ones,

Sara S. Cleveland
Executive Director

Congratulations!

Hats off to the following State Representatives, who will be representing their districts at the Capitol when legislative session begins in January:



State House Dist. 47, Rep. Valinda Bolton

In 2006, Valinda was elected with 50.24% of the vote, and in 2008, with the help of NARAL Pro-Choice Texas PAC on her first re-election campaign, she increased her win margin to 51.2%. We are glad to welcome this pro-choice champion back to the Capitol in 2009 to take on the fake clinics known as crisis pregnancy centers and continue the fight against child abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault.



State House Dist. 52, Diana Maldonado

This was one of the closest races in the state. Diana's anti-choice foes thought they could intimidate her and hold onto this seat, but they were wrong! NARAL Pro-Choice Texas PAC volunteers contacted an estimated 600-700 voters in Williamson County, letting them know that Diana would stand up for them on issues of education, transportation, and women's health.



State House Dist. 133, Kristi Thibaut

This was sweet victory for Kristi Thibaut as she defeated Jim Murphy, who beat her in 2006, and it was quite a nail-biter. NARAL Pro-Choice Texas PAC contacted an estimated 500-550 voters in this race, and Kristi squeaked ahead with 460 votes to win. Hats off to our volunteers who persuaded those voters that Kristi is the candidate committed to policies that put families first.

2008 General Election Wrap-Up

By Ambrosia Ortiz y Prentice, Electoral Director

At long last, we will have a pro-choice U.S. president again in January 2009! We know that it's important to have a commander-in-chief who cares about reproductive rights because they appoint the Supreme Court justices, those all-powerful guardians of *Roe v. Wade*, and issue executive orders that impact women's wombs all over the world, such as the Global Gag Rule.

While we celebrate our success on the national level, it's important to look all the way down the list of newly elected public officials to see where they stand on issues of reproductive freedom, because your local state representatives and senators make decisions each legislative session that affect your access to reproductive health services.

At first glance, the Texas election results may not seem like cause for rejoicing: we still have an anti-choice majority in both state houses. However, this election helped us close the gap in a big way.

The truth is, we don't actually know for certain where all legislators stand on the choice issue. Not all representatives and senators get a chance to vote on legislation specifically affecting reproductive rights. When we're lucky (and doing our job well), anti-choice legislation gets stuck in committee and never makes it to the floor for a vote. In the 2007 legislative session, if all the legislators whose position was "Pro-Choice," "Mixed-Choice," or "Unknown" had been on our side for a vote, we would have had 64 votes against 85 firmly anti-choice votes. But after the 2008 General Election, this is down to only 79 definite anti-choice votes.

This is good news! However, there are more "Unknowns" than before, so we need to do a good job of educating our new legislators about what reproductive health services we need and telling them why reproductive freedom is important to all Texans.

In the Texas Senate, we improved our margin even more, going from 13 pro/mixed-choice seats to 15, and from 18 anti-choice seats to 16. They're only ahead by one seat! Are we rejoicing yet? On top of that, **9 State Senators and 35 State Representatives have signed the Prevention First Pledge**, promising to focus on the commonsense goals of preventing unintended pregnancy and reducing the need for abortion by supporting access to family-planning services; making birth control, including the "morning-after" pill, more affordable and accessible; and teaching our young people honest, medically accurate and realistic sex-education.

So you see, we're in a much better place than we were two years ago, although we cannot ease up on the fight for reproductive justice. Anti-choice bills have already been introduced for the 2009 Texas Legislative Session, and much work will have to be done on the federal level before the harmful anti-choice policies of the last eight years have been neutralized. For the moment, though, we should take a moment to take some credit for all our hard work. We won a majority of the races endorsed by NARAL Pro-Choice Texas, we recruited many new volunteers to work on those races, and we made **2,008 calls in 2008** for pro-choice candidates. I'd say that calls for a little rejoicing.

NPCT Out and About...

NPCT Reps Attend SisterSong Meeting in Atlanta



November 15-16, Director of Outreach & Administration Katie Mahoney and Huston-Tillotson Campus Organizer Erica Jackson attended the national membership meeting of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective in Atlanta, GA.

The SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective is a network of local, regional and national grassroots agencies representing five primary ethnic populations/indigenous nations in the United States: African-American, Arab-American/Middle Eastern, Asian/Pacific Islander, Latina, and Native American/Indigenous. The Collective was formed in 1997 to educate women of color and policy makers on reproductive and sexual health and rights, and to work toward the access of health services, information and resources that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. SisterSong and its member organizations achieve these goals through public policy work, advocacy, service delivery and health education within communities on the local, national and international levels.

Erica Jackson reflects on her experience at the meeting: "The impact that the SisterSong event had on my work was right on time. I work with teenage mothers on probation, and to be able to go and share this with them and the other female mentors... was actually a relief of stress. And as far as my kids... Well I want to believe that they can feel my energy that is saying no matter what their background is, or who their father is or is not, and [regardless] of the choices that mama has made along the way, all five of them can and will be all right."

For more information about SisterSong, visit www.SisterSong.net.

NPCT at Houston Women's Fest

Electoral Director Ambrosia Ortiz y Prentice and Rice University Campus Organizer Whitney Sandin (wo)manned NPCT's table at the annual Houston Women's Festival earlier this fall:



Healthy Women, Healthy Families Holds First Regional Community Forum

By Graham M. Smith, originally posted at *Impolite Company* (<http://morisey.typepad.com>)

On December 2, the Central Texas members of the *Healthy Women, Healthy Families (HWHF)* coalition held their first regional community forum on women's health at Faith Presbyterian Church in Austin. Co-organizers and coalition partners who participated in this event included **ADAPT of Texas, allgo, Austin Women's Health Center, Health Care for All Texas, Jane's Due Process, NARAL Pro-Choice Texas Foundation, Planned Parenthood of the Texas Capital Region, SafePlace, Texas Advocacy Project, Transgender Education Network of Texas, and Whole Woman's Health.**

HWHF is a unique attempt to listen to stories from women about the problems they have had accessing health care and what their priorities are when it comes to health care services that they need. But not only is it designed to listen to women, it's also designed to magnify their voices in speaking out about these concerns—both by making their stories available to decision-makers and the public, and by empowering women to speak out on their own directly to the politicians and leaders who make public health policy. The coalition plans to conduct forums across the state and any woman in Texas is welcome to respond to the survey.

At last night's forum, Katie Mahoney released some of the coalition's initial results from Central Texas respondents (around 150 so far). The surveys are designed to rank health care concerns and she talked about the top six most urgent health care needs indicated in survey responses:

1. **Safe and affordable child care**
2. **Health care for those who have no insurance or are underinsured**
3. **Family planning services for teens and women**
4. **Medically accurate sex education**
5. **Health care access and preventive care for the disabled**
6. **Breast and cervical cancer screening**



NPCT Foundation Director of Outreach & Administration Katie Mahoney

(Remember, these are only preliminary findings and the coalition will continue to accept surveys from respondents through next summer. This is the easiest way imaginable to get your voice heard when it comes to the health care priorities you think are important. If you don't see your concerns on that top six list, do something about it and take the survey.)



Left: Lisa Scheps. Right: Priscilla Hale.

The next speaker was **Lisa Scheps from the Transgender Education Network of Texas**, who focused on some of the problems faced by transgendered individuals and some stories highlighting these issues. **Priscilla Hale of allgo** followed and discussed health care and reproductive issues that affect her constituency, queer persons of color. She also read several stories submitted to the *HWHF* coalition. One was from a woman who miscarried and, despite having a good job and insurance, faced economic uncertainty because of over \$2000 in health care bills on top of the emotional trauma of the miscarriage. In another story, a woman on WIC assistance who is unable to get high quality food for her children because of program restrictions asked: Why do I have to feed my children junk?

State Rep. Donna Howard talked about some of the problems women face in getting their voices heard in the Capitol when it comes to health care. Despite gaining seats in the last election, only 25% of State Representatives are women and only three State Senators are women. Also, what many of us fail to recognize is that not only are women often left out of the policy-making process in terms of health care, but women also carry a heavier burden when it comes to health care expenses and responsibility. For instance, just the wide array of health care needs women face in terms of pregnancy and reproductive health add considerably to their health care burden. Likewise, when there is an illness in the family, it is often the woman who takes time out from work to care for the children or sick parents.



Rep. Donna Howard

Rep. Howard also focused on the best way to approach your representatives and make sure they are listening when you talk to them:

1. **Talk to your legislators between Sessions, rather than trying to get their attention when they're trying to cram two years' worth of work into 180 days.**
2. **Don't just throw facts at them; tell them stories.**
3. **Keep it concise and easy to follow—a single sheet your legislator can take with them and refer to is a good idea.**
4. **The more personal the better, whether in terms of the story you are telling or the type of contact you make with your representative.** Personal, face-to-face contact is the best way to make an impression. Phone calls are the next best. Letters come next. Emails, especially form emails, is the least effective method of contact.



Representatives from Austin Women's Health Center and ADAPT of Texas

Rep. Howard closed with two important points to keep in mind: **never hesitate to make your voice heard and health care is a right and not a privilege.**

Remember, if you haven't taken the survey yet now is the time to get your voice heard at www.HealthyWomenHealthyFamilies.org!