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Looking Back on the 2011 Legislative Session

As we reflect on the 82nd Texas Legislative Session and called special session, we want to take a moment to thank all of you for your hard work and commitment to reproductive choice, health and freedom for Texas women and their families. The recent and continuing attacks on reproductive rights at the state and federal levels have been taxing for all of us – and we are so thankful for you and your tireless support.

The bad news is that, out of all the proactive women’s health bills that were filed, most were left pending in committee or died at the end of the legislative session. Yet again, a majority of Texas lawmakers have demonstrated that the health of our women and families is among the lowest of their priorities.

The good news is that out of the many, many anti-choice bills that were filed, we managed to stop all but two from making it onto Gov. Perry’s desk to be signed into law! More information about these two bills can be found below. As always, your support—whether through emails and phone calls to your lawmakers, or donations to help fund our legislative program—was instrumental in making this happen.

As we mention in our current “Letter from the Executive Director” (p. 2), voting matters! This was a difficult legislative session for all of us working on progressive issues in Texas, due in large part to the many conservative legislators who were elected to the State House and Senate last November. It was a harsh but necessary reminder that there is a direct connection between the candidates who are elected to office and the policies that govern our health, our bodies, and our families. Rest assured that, as always, we will be working hard in November 2012 to make sure as many pro-choice candidates as possible are elected—and we hope that when the time comes, you will join us!

Anti-Choice Bills Signed Into Law (effective 9/1/11):

HB 15 (The “Sonogram Bill”)

The final version of this “emergency” legislation was passed in late May and becomes effective September 1st. This bill changes the way that doctors who perform abortions treat their patients. Among other restrictions, it would force the provider to describe the fetus (including limbs and organs) to the patient and force the woman to listen to the heartbeat of the fetus. It would also create other unnecessary and invasive requirements, such as a 24 hour waiting period between the sonogram and the abortion procedure. This breach in the doctor-patient relationship and women’s autonomy to make their own personal, private medical decisions was one of the most insidious and contentious pieces of legislation of the session. On June 13, our colleagues at the Center for Reproductive Rights filed a lawsuit against this piece of legislation. To learn more about this lawsuit, visit TrustTexasWomen.org.

SB 257 (“Choose Life” License Plates Bill)

This bill creates “Choose Life” license plates and a fund that helps finance crisis pregnancy centers. These centers frequently provide biased (at best) and false or medically inaccurate (at worst) information to pregnant women seeking their services, and many of these centers already receive state funds.

You can support NARAL Pro-Choice Texas Foundation (aka TARAL Education Fund) every time you shop at Randall’s! Next time you go, request a Good Neighbor Program form at the customer service center and link your Remarkable Card to us. After that, each time you use your Remarkable Card, a percentage of your spending will be donated to NARAL Pro-Choice Texas Foundation! Our Good Neighbor number is 9526.

Meet Our Legislative Counsel

Since 2008, NARAL Pro-Choice Texas has been lucky enough to call Blake Rocap our Legislative Counsel. Blake came to us with a wealth of public interest law experience in women’s health and human and civil rights, and is one of the most steadfast and committed advocates for reproductive rights you will ever encounter! Blake is our political strategy mastermind, and during legislative session he spends most of his time inside the Capitol, attending and testifying at committee hearings and meeting with lawmakers to discuss proposed women’s health legislation.



Want to see Blake in action? Visit www.tinyurl.com/sonobill (you will need a REALmedia player on your computer in order to view this video) and scroll ahead to 1:26:00 to watch Blake’s testimony against the sonogram bill from this year’s legislative session.

NARAL Pro-Choice Texas
PO Box 684602
Austin, TX 78768
Phone: (512) 462-1661
Fax: (512) 462-2007
info@prochoicetexas.org
www.ProChoiceTexas.org

Executive Director

Sara S. Cleveland

Program Director

Katie Mahoney

Legislative Counsel

Blake Rocap

Board of Directors

Brooke Casteel

Carol Drennan

Katherine Haenschen

Luke Hayes

Rachel Howell

Jennifer Mattingly

Catherine Mauzy

Janet Maykus

Lillian Ortiz (President)

Ambrosia Ortiz y Prentice

Yvonne Pelayo

Stephanie Reich

Warren Willis

Foundation Board of Directors

Brita Hansen

Rachel Howell

Jennifer Mattingly

Catherine Mauzy

Janet Maykus

Yvonne Pelayo

Ambrosia Ortiz y Prentice

Stephanie Reich

Does your employer match gifts to nonprofit organizations? Double the value of your donation to NARAL Pro-Choice Texas Foundation in one easy step! You'll receive a tax deduction and so will your employer. Please ask your personnel office for the employee matching gift forms, sign and send them to us, and we'll take care of the rest! [Please note: Our tax ID number is 74-2543342.]



Letter from the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

Upon the adjournment of the House in late June, there were loads of articles, blogs, tweets, and Facebook posts recapping legislative session, each with its own ideas about what the session boiled down to. Never one to watch a bandwagon rolling by without leaping on, I'm going to throw in my two cents.

I could talk about the insidious mandatory ultrasound bill, Gov. Perry's pet legislation; I could condemn our legislators who voted to gut family planning in the name of reducing abortions; I could lambast the elected officials who squandered months of time and millions of dollars passing legislation which will ultimately cripple our public education system, eliminate healthcare for our state's most vulnerable citizens, compromise the environment, gerrymander districts, and the list goes on... Instead I'm going to state the obvious: VOTING MATTERS.

The reason all of these terrible bills were able to pass boils down to the fact that voters just didn't turn out in 2010 and a bunch of anti-choice zealots were elected and started trying to "out-conservative" each other. Sadly, many of them thought the best place to set up camp and make their stand was in the uteri of Texas women. We have to change that and we have to start now.

November 2012 may sound like a far and distant time, but we need to harness the rage and frustration that is so raw and so real and use it to begin a targeted attack. We need to start identifying key voters now. We need to start registering those who aren't yet registered. We need to work with our allies to identify strong, viable candidates to challenge these misogynists, we need to raise money, build volunteer teams, and we need to seek retribution for the attacks that Texas women faced day after day of this legislative session.

I call on you now. Please raise your hand to volunteer. Please renew your membership. Please make a contribution to ensure we have the resources we need to mount this counter-attack, because the time is now. These guys sat there day after day in the smug belief that they wouldn't be called to account for their actions, for their votes, but we were watching – we were ALWAYS watching – and we will be bringing to light every insult, every dismissal, every remark they made as we dedicate the next 15 months to bringing them down and replacing them with candidates who TRUST TEXAS WOMEN. Stand with us.

In solidarity,

Sara S. Cleveland
Executive Director

SAVE THE DATE For the 25TH ANNUAL
CELEBRATION OF CHOICE
Featuring
SUZANNA CHOFFEL
September 21, 2011 The Austin Airport Hilton 6:00-9:00
TICKETS: \$55 ADULTS \$25 STUDENTS
For tickets or more information
call 512-462-1661 or visit www.prochoicetexas.org
BENEFITING: NARAL Pro-Choice Texas

Where in the World Are Our Former Interns?

Every year, we at NARAL Pro-Choice Texas are privileged to work with many amazing young people through our internship program. We are honored to have the opportunity to help train the leaders of tomorrow, and while their names and their faces may not be familiar to you, the contributions they make to our organization are immeasurable and invaluable. Our interns conduct research, draft articles and reports, table at festivals, organize outreach efforts, provide support for special events, and help manage the thousand and one behind-the-scenes administrative tasks that keep our organization running smoothly.

We like to say that once we get interns in our clutches, we never let them go—and it is always a pleasure to get updates about what some of our fabulous former interns are up to. Here's just a small sampling of what some of our former interns have been doing since they left NARAL Pro-Choice Texas. Whether through law, policy, community activism, education or public health they are all doing their part to make the world a better place and we couldn't be prouder of them!

Jamie (Spring 2007): Jamie is currently working with Teach for America in the Mississippi Delta, teaching 9th and 10th grade English in a Title I school. In the future, she plans to either teach at an international school or get her Master's degree in Education.

Shane (2007-2008): After graduating college, Shane worked as the Canvassing Director at NARAL Pro-Choice New York, doing community outreach and fundraising in NY, NJ and PA. Soon after, he began attending Berkeley Law School and worked his first summer at the Unified Family Court in San Francisco, clerking under the Hon. Lilian Sing. This next semester, he will start his final year of law school.

Nhu-Y (Summer 2008): Nhu-Y just completed her first year of law school at Boston College Law. This summer, she is working as a Legal Intern for AIDS Action, a Boston non-profit providing assistance and legal counsel to people living with HIV/AIDS. She will be working directly with the clients, helping them apply for income disability benefits and securing their access to healthcare through medical insurance.

Fatima (Fall 2008): Fatima is currently interning at ACLU Pennsylvania and loving it. She is working on a pending case challenging discrimination against same-sex couples, reproductive health rights for incarcerated women in jails, and more.

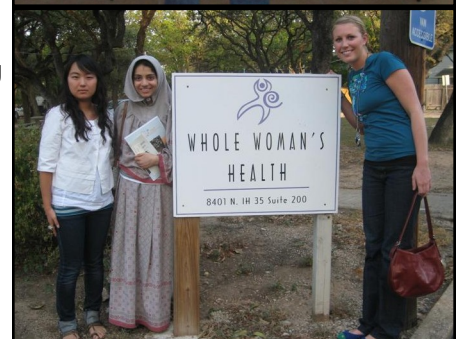
Danielle (Summer 2009): After completing her Master's degree at the LBJ school of Public Affairs at UT Austin last May, Danielle moved to Washington, D.C. to work at the National Women's Law Center. She is a policy fellow for their health and reproductive rights team and works on a variety of women's health issues including Medicaid, preventive health care, and the implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

Bethany (Summer 2009): Bethany is currently learning about European Law in Arcachon, France, as part of her studies at Charlotte School of Law in Charlotte, NC. In her free time she enjoys knitting and gardening but law school ensures that she has precious little free time! She and her husband live in North Carolina.

Julia (Summer 2009): Julia is moving to New York City this summer to start Teach For America. Since graduating from Wesleyan University in May 2010, she has been working for a School Management Organization in Philadelphia doing development work. She is excited to transition to TFA and get into the classroom.

Amelia (Spring 2010): After a year and a half coordinating volunteers the Capital Area Food Bank (part of that time as an AmeriCorps VISTA), Amelia will be moving to a new position there, Development Manager, starting July 1. She is also about to mark one and a half years serving on the board of the Lilith Fund, raising money to help pay for Texas women's abortions when they're unable to come up with funds. She lives in Austin with her partner and dog (whose names confusingly rhyme), and often enjoys being a hermit outside of work.

Continued on page 4...



Former Interns (continued from page 3)

Eric (Spring 2010): Since completing his BA in Political Science in December, Eric has become active as a leader with Austin Interfaith, working on local and state issues that affect families in Austin and focusing on developing leaders from member institutions, as well as within his own institution, St. David's Episcopal Church. The Bishop of his Diocese recently affirmed Eric's call to Ordained Ministry (Priesthood) and he will begin attending Seminary of the Southwest in Austin this fall.

Molly (Summer 2010): Molly is starting her second and final year of an MA program in Folk Studies with a Public Sector Concentration at Western Kentucky University. This year, she will be a teaching assistant for a Cultural Diversity Service Learning class that involves students partnering with immigrant and refugee families in Bowling Green, KY to find sustainable solutions to specific issues families are facing now in the community. She also teaches ESL at the same International Center. This summer, she is interning with the Pennsylvania Folklife Archives, working on cultural survey projects and helping with the groundwork to start a sewing/textile/fabric arts circle for immigrant and refugee women in Harrisburg, PA.

Lindsey (Summer 2010): In August 2010, Lindsey finished her Master's in Latin American Studies at UT. A few months later, she started at the Austin Humane Society as the Community Outreach Coordinator for the Feral Cat Program in March. Through this position she works on increasing community participation in a free spay/neuter clinic for feral or stray cats. In the future, she would like to continue doing community outreach or volunteer coordination, preferably in an organization that serves women, immigrants, or LGBT groups. Aside from working, she has stayed active in Austin politics by participating in several demonstrations for progressive women's, immigrants', and workers' rights.

Bryn (Summer 2010): Bryn graduated from Dickinson College in Pennsylvania this May. Over the summer, she will spend a month in Guatemala to work on a grant through New York University to implement reproductive health education classes in the town of Antigua. After her time there, she plans to return to Austin to begin classes toward a nursing and public health degree.

Are you a former NARAL Pro-Choice Texas intern? Get in touch... we'd love to hear from you!



A Word From Our RRASC Intern

Karen, one of NARAL Pro-Choice Texas' summer interns, comes to us courtesy of our colleagues at Hampshire College's Civil Liberties and Public Policy program, which provides financial support for young men and women to spend the summer working at reproductive justice organizations across the US.

I am very excited to be working for NARAL Pro-Choice Texas this summer as I am really passionate about the reproductive rights movement. I was fortunate enough to gain this opportunity as a Reproductive Rights Activist Service Corps intern through Hampshire College's Civil Liberties and Public Policy program, which hosts a very prestigious reproductive rights conference every April with guests and speakers from all over the world. I am an undergraduate student in Western Massachusetts. I study Art and Liberal Studies with concentrations in Women's Studies, Spanish and Environmental Science. I hope to eventually work for a non-profit organization that helps women access reproductive rights services more easily.



Interns Katie (left) and Karen visit with State Rep. Donna Howard

I am all about a woman's right to choose. Some people see abortion as inhumane. I believe that in some cases it can be the most humane thing you can do. It makes me angry that the government can even think they have the power to take away the rights to our own body. That is why I am so passionate and personally invested in reproductive rights.

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