



WINTER 2007

# RAISE YOUR VOICE!

*Pro-Choice Public Education Project Newsletter*

## MY JOURNEY TOWARD JUSTICE, OR HOW I LEFT CHOICE BEHIND

*By Aimee Thorne-Thomsen*

*Can you be Pro-Choice even if you don't really understand what "Choice" means? If the answer is yes, then I've been Pro-Choice all of my life. And yet, I remember the day that revealed what Choice really means to me.*

I was seventeen years old and on vacation from my fancy boarding school, where I was a scholarship student. As usual, my friends and I were meeting up at our old junior high school to spend the day together. I was just back from visiting colleges that summer, and I had my heart set on going to an Ivy League school. My father dropped out of the ninth grade. Pop, my maternal grandfather, left school in third grade to support himself running errands and doing odd jobs. Going to college, particularly an elite school

was a big deal to my whole family, and my chances for going to one of those schools were looking good.

As I waited on the platform for the #1 train, I realized I hadn't brought an umbrella. The day was dreary, but I was too excited to see my friends to care. By the time the subway arrived a drizzling rain had started. I hopped onto the train before the doors closed and slid into an empty seat. Next to me sat another young Latina, and like me she was into bright lipstick and hoop earrings. We both had

long curly hair, which she wore loose down her back. I was much less confident and wore my mass of hair in a ponytail high on my head. I noticed she seemed deep in thought when I saw it – a neon green pamphlet. In big bold letters on the front it read "After your abortion, then what?" My mind exploded with a million different feelings. What was she doing with that pamphlet? This Hermana was my age, from my neighborhood; our families were probably from the same island. For all I knew we could have been related. Why her and not me? I could have just as easily been sitting in her seat holding that green pamphlet. Instead, I was dreaming of making the honor roll and going to Yale, and she was considering her "then what?"

A few months later, I was back at school working on my college applications and dreading the personal essay I had to write. Then I remembered that day on the train. I went back to my dorm and searched my journal for the entry I had written about the Hermana with the neon green pamphlet. She changed my life that day. She was doing the best she could to make her life better, to make the right decisions for herself. I wanted to reach out to her



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**REFLECTIONS ON A MOVEMENT**

*By Mary Mahoney*

**R***oe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion for all Americans, turned thirty-four this winter. To honor the occasion, we should take time to reflect on the women who helped us reach this anniversary. Their struggles and determination made it possible for many women to have autonomy over their own bodies, health and lives—but there is much work left to do.

Some believe that my generation takes for granted all that was handed down to us, but I would like to give you another perspective. While abortion remains a critical issue to young women, other reproductive health concerns have gained importance in ensuring a woman's ability to have control over her body. The immediate and enduring threat of HIV/AIDS, for example, is a crucial point of action for people under the age of 25. More than 15 percent of women don't have health insurance in this country, making it difficult, if not impossible, for them to visit a gynecologist for annual exams or STD screening, let alone afford abortion services. After 30 years of the Hyde amendment, low-income women on Medicaid continue to be denied financial coverage from the government to obtain abortions. And a new vaccine, Gardasil, can be used against HPV, yet the cost of this series of shots is beyond most women's means.

We may have gained ground for the women's movement when *Roe* was decided, but we have unfortunately fallen behind when it comes to educating our youth about what their reproductive options are and how to access them. Under the Bush administration's abstinence-only-until-marriage program, young women are often left in the dark when it comes to contraception, pregnancy, and STD prevention. Young women are being asked to take complete responsibility for their bodies but often are without the access to the education that would enable to make safe choices.

Yet there are reasons to be optimistic. As we celebrate the 34th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the entire pro-choice community should be encouraged that young women are indeed working to build a holistic approach to reproductive choice that is both inclusive and adaptable. The phrase "pro-choice" no longer refers to a single issue; it has expanded to meet the reproductive health concerns facing all women. We are no longer starting and ending our conversations with abortion; we are talking about comprehensive sex education, HIV/AIDS, access to health care, including maternal care, we are supporting motherhood, and we are listening to the views and ideas of younger women. Most importantly, we are learning that in order to empower all women and make the most of our activism, we have to expand our work to encompass the diverse sets of circumstances under which women in this country live.

On this 34th anniversary of *Roe*, I urge all young women to embrace the emerging and expanding vision of reproductive justice, and to tell your own story of the issues that you face in your own communities each and every day. Our fight may not be the same as those of generations past, and the way in which we go about it may be different from what others had envisioned. But in order to build movements, we must be able to fight our own battles in our own way. As we do so, we look to the women who fought for *Roe* to give us their wisdom and expertise, and we hope they have faith in our abilities to face the new challenges to reproductive justice that will inevitably arise in the years to come. 

*Excerpted from an article entitled What Roe Means to Me: Growing Up Under Legalized Abortion printed on the American Progress website 22 January, 2007. <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/01/roewade.html>*

◀ *continued from p. 1*

and hug her, let her know that she wasn't alone, but I couldn't. I didn't dare intrude on her life, so I did the only thing I could think of - I pulled my journal out of my bag and started to write. I didn't want to lose a single detail of that train ride or the young Latina, who could have been me. Later that year, I earned a place in Yale's freshmen class, I think in large part, because of her. I never knew her name or the outcome of her "then what?" I hoped that her life's path had led her to amazing places, and I was grateful an abortion would allow her a different "then what?" than might have otherwise been possible.

Since that train ride, I've thought a great deal about Choice and how different it is for different people. And since that train ride, I've remained steadfast and loyal to the ideals embodied in Choice. I've argued with family and friends about abortion rights, voted for Pro-Choice candidates, and become director of a national reproductive rights organization. But Choice means something different to me now. Choice is actually phony. Although Roe is on the books, whether a woman has access to an abortion depends

on many factors, such as where she lives, what resources she has, whether she is a woman of color or a young woman. Choice doesn't address privilege. Choice doesn't acknowledge class differences or racism. In other words, Choice doesn't understand me. It doesn't see all of me. It embraces just a small part of who I am or might be, making the other parts of me invisible. Choice speaks only to a small part of the way I live in this world, and I must have more than that. I deserve more than that. My young Latina sister on the train had access to an abortion, but she could just as easily not have had services accessible. She deserves better than that. Yes, I owe tremendous debt to all those who fought for Choice, but I've realized that my relationship with Choice just isn't enough for me anymore, and it shouldn't be enough for all of us either.

I am leaving Choice behind for something more. I am moving to Justice. With Choice I never felt I could be myself; I always felt I had to choose between being a woman and being Puerto Rican or being spiritual or radical or anything. Justice does not split me up into different identities and isolate them from each other.

With Justice I can be a whole person, and not just the sum of my identities, and with Justice I can bring all of myself to every issue I care about.

Ultimately, though, Justice is about power. Justice gives us the tools to identify power and talk about it, but it doesn't stop there. Justice requires us to confront power when exercised against us, acquire it and use it to create change that benefits us all. Justice helps us understand whatever privilege we may enjoy without blaming us or pitting us against each other. Or without letting us off the hook. When people ask me what I do for a living, I often respond, "I'm trying to change the world." Choice is not going to deliver us from the many evils we suffer as women, or more specifically as women of color, young women and low-income women. Justice just may. And that's what Justice is at its core - about trying to change the world. There's nothing wrong with Choice, we've simply outgrown it. We need something more radical, more revolutionary than Choice. We need Justice, not just for ourselves, but for all of us. Surely, we deserve that. 📖

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## “SOMOS TRABAJADORAS SEXUALES Y NO PROSTITUTAS.”

By Lani Blechman

The women had been speaking to us for over an hour. The younger woman was listening to a question from a fellow student when she suddenly turned to the group and asked, “Están contra trabajo sexual? [Are you all against sex work?]” I have to admit, I wasn’t prepared for the question, and I had grown an immense admiration for the organizing and courage of the sex workers sitting in front of me. Would being against sex work mean being against the women and men who do the work? And then Rayo answered my question, “Pensamos que en un mundo mejor, trabajo sexual no existe. [We think that in a better world, sex work does not exist.]”

This is a partial narrative of the experience I had with sex-workers in Mexico. Sex-work, the chosen term for people who work in the stigmatized prostitution industry, is a complicated issue, and one that involves many different individuals. But through my close interactions with one sex-workers union in Mexico, I have learned a great deal about both the dignity of the workers and the hypocrisy that they are faced with in the industry.

For the fall of my third year of college, I studied in Mexico, and for part of that semester I was staying with a campesino (farmworker) family in Toluca de Guadalupe, a rural community in the state of Tlaxcala. Tlaxcala is kind of like the Rhode Island of Mexico. That is, it’s the smallest state (although in land size it’s a bit bigger than RI). It’s also near the capital, just a couple hours in a car heading east from Mexico City. The family that I was staying with belongs to Consejo Nacional Urbano Campesino (CNUC), the National Urban and Campesino Council, which has a

*Queremos que todos sabenlo: si podemos organizarse aqui en Apizaco, todos los trabajadores sexuales pueden organizarse cual quiere comunidad.*

Colectivo Red de Mujeres en Pro de sus Derechos, Tlaxcala, México

huge presence in Tlaxcala helping communities to organize by building community centers, working to retain the wages of ex-braceros (laborers)—who are tough old guys!—getting state funding for youth computer education programs, responding to natural disasters, and all kinds of things. CNUC’s on-going and fundamental work involves organizing campesinos to obtain essential fertilizers for their crops and to access markets in a world economy that is shutting out small production.

“Vamos a ir a un reunión a las siete con las Trabajadoras Sexuales [We are going to a meeting at seven with the Sex Workers],” I told Júlia, my homestay ‘mom’.

“Bueno. ¿Mañana, a qué hora quieres desayuno? [Ok. What time do you want breakfast tomorrow?]” she replied.

“A las ocho y media, por favor. ¡Hasta mañana! [8:30, please. See you tomorrow!]” I said.

In Apizaco, a small city half an hour from Toluca, CNUC has an office, more of a room for meetings. The fifteen of us on the Mexico Solidarity Network study abroad program had moved our chairs into a lopsided circle before the women came. There were three representatives from Colectivo Red de Mujeres en Pro de sus Derechos (CRMPD), the Women’s Rights Network Collective.

The youngest of the three, Rayo, was the most outspoken;

she spoke fast with authority and sincerity. And after we had gone around stating our names and where we were from, one of the first things that she told us was, “No somos prostitutas. Los políticos son las prostitutas. [We are not prostitutes. The politicians are the prostitutes.]”

Rayo explained further: “Nosotros decimos que somos trabajadoras sexuales y no prostitutas. Prostitutos y prostitutas son las autoridades gubernamentales que se venden a los ricos para hacer leyes que beneficien a los poderosos y perjudiquen a los pobres. Allá arriba son ellos y ellas quienes vendemos dignidad, y nosotros no denedmos nuestra dignidad y exigimos que se nos repsete. [We say that we are sex workers and not prostitutes. Prostitute men and women are the government authorities who sell out to the rich and create laws that benefit the powerful and harm the poor. They are the ones who sell their dignity; and we do not sell our dignity and we demand respect.]”

And it was with dignity that the three women spoke to us of the problems that they faced individually and as sex workers, their vision of the world and poverty, and how they had organized to overcome some of these obstacles.

There are currently twenty women sex workers in CRMPD, the sex worker’s union that is part of CNUC. Some were born in

Tlaxcala but many came from other parts of México. In Apizaco, pretty much the only jobs available are in the maquilas in the industrial parks on the outskirts of the city. And anyone walking down the street will tell you that if you want to make money, if you need to support a family, the maquila is not the place to do it. The women of CRMPD are mostly single mothers with more than one child to support. They explained to us that capitalism causes people to be poor, while the capitalists get richer.

The 1917 Constitution of Mexico does not make sex work illegal, but it does make it illegal to exploit people for sex. Pimping is illegal. In reality, however, the pimps are the ones with the politicians in their pockets, and the sex workers are the ones who face harassment, detainment, fines, and exploitation from the authorities. Before the sex workers of Apizaco approached CNUC with their desire to form a union, the police regularly extorted money from the women, and in exchange they were not arrested. Or they usually were not arrested. They also faced violence from their customers, often when they insisted on using condoms. Adequate health care and information was also difficult to access.

When the women approached CNUC, they were not automati-

cally welcomed with open arms. While many were supportive of the proposal, others met it with hostility. The organization entered into an educational process of connecting the exploitation of sex workers with the struggles of campesinos and decriminalizing this extremely marginalized population. One result of this, I experienced with my family in Toluca who took it in stride when I told them about the meeting. Another result was the formation of Colectivo Red de Mujeres en Pro de sus Derechos (CRMPD).

CRMPD has been organized for over a year now and has been able to do many things that were not possible before. They no longer pay extortion to the police, and they use cellphones to communicate and insure their safety. While working, they keep tabs on one another, and if a client is violent, they use their cellphones to call for help. An ally, Doctor Luis, is always on call. CRMPD organizes workshops on women's health, and CNUC has helped them access resources for getting free condoms. They've also established connections with other organizations. They are now a part of La Red Mexicana de Trabajo Sexual [The Mexican Sex Worker's Network] and send representatives to national conferences. They have contacts with sex workers in Spain

and Brazil. And last February they joined La Otra Campaña, a national campaign against neoliberal capitalism initiated by the Zapatistas, an indigenous movement in Chiapas, Mexico.

The women of CRMPD have asserted their dignity, and through this they have become a visible part of the community in Apizaco, in CNUC and Tlaxcala, throughout Mexico, and within the international movement of sex workers. "Mi familia lo sabe y no le da vergüenza, [My family knows and they're not ashamed]," one said and they all nodded.

After the meeting, the women of CRMPD got into our professor's van with us to catch a ride back to the center of town. When we got there, they turned to us and asked if we'd like to see where they work. We followed them across the street and entered an unmarked door that I'm sure I had passed at least three times while walking around the city. There was a couch and another room that was separated by a curtain, and they were concerned that we didn't all have a place to sit. There was a loud knocking on the door, and one of the women called out, "¡No hay servicio!" Sitting in the little house in the center of Apizaco, I knew it in my head and could feel it in my bones: this is not a place where dignity is sold. 



#### Sources:

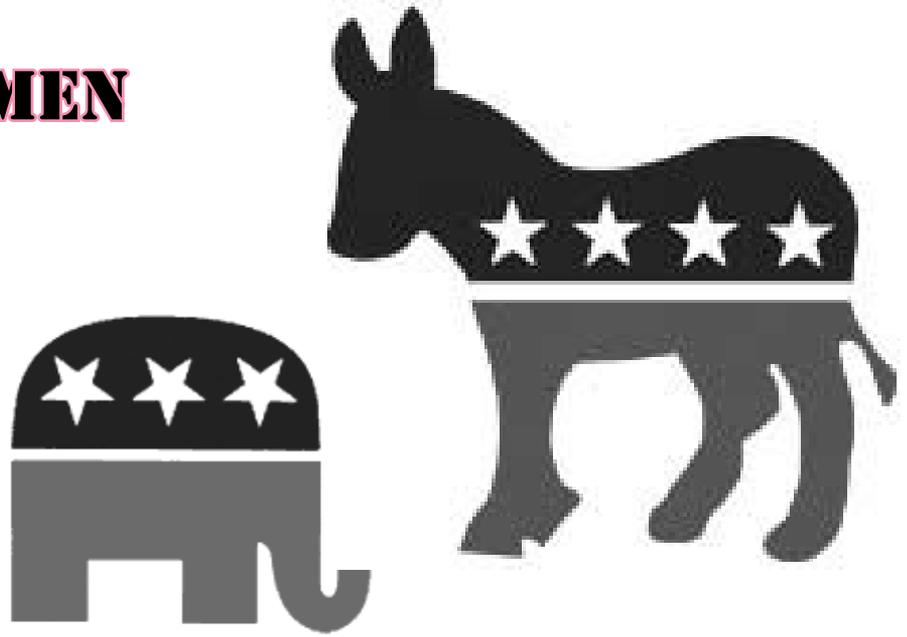
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# WHY YOUNG WOMEN SHOULD BECOME LOBBYISTS

*By Nicole Clark*



**F**rom the days of burning bras in the late sixties to the March for Women’s Lives in 2004, women have been voicing their concern about the government trying to tell us what we can and cannot do to our bodies. While nowadays you may get odd stares if you take one of your Victoria’s Secret bras and set it ablaze with a burning match (those bras are expensive, after all!), young women can still fight the war on our bodies within the halls of Congress as well as at our own state capitols. When it comes to sexual and reproductive rights, it’s important for women, especially young women, to care about the laws and policies that are passed or taken away by our state and federal legislators to ensure that our voices (and our bodies) are protected. This is where lobbying comes in.

## WHAT IS LOBBYING?

“Lobbying” is the act of speaking with local and federal public policy decision-makers in an effort to gain their support for current legislative laws or new bills that are in favor of what you feel citizens will want. The word “lobby” comes from the idea that advocates would stand in the lobbies of their representatives and senators and push to have people support their issues. In other words, lobbying is about getting people to do what you want. The more persuasive you are, the better your chances are of having more laws that will reflect positively on the group of individuals you’re representing.

## WHO DO LOBBYISTS TARGET?

Lobbyists target our political legislators, people that we vote into state and local office. For federal leaders, they are elected to represent their home state as legislators in Washington, DC. They become members of Congress, and are either a member of the House of Representatives or the Senate. For state legislators, they are elected to represent their county or district, and are also a member of their state’s House or Senate.

## WHAT IS A LEGISLATOR?

A legislator has many roles—lawmaker, a representative of her/his state or local government, and an overseer of the interests of her/his national and state citizens. As a lawmaker, legislators propose, study, discuss, and vote on legislation to become law as well as modify or completely eliminate current laws. As a representative, legislators serve her/his constituents (citizens) at the federal or state level. Federal legislators serve as liaisons between their state and Washington, DC, and state legislators serve as liaisons between their county/district and their local government. As overseers, legislators make sure that the laws are being carried out according to their legislative intent.

## WHAT DOES THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS INVOLVE?

The legislative process is very extensive. However, knowing the steps taken to make laws is beneficial in becoming a great lobbyist. Here's a brief rundown:

Members of the House or the Senate introduce a bill (a proposed draft of a law prior to becoming a law). (The President or State Governor can also introduce a bill). The bill is debated amongst the legislators and is given to committees to be revised. Once revised, the bill is brought back before the House or the Senate to be approved. If there is a similar bill that has already been introduced, the bill may then be given to a conference committee to reconcile differences in both bills. The final version of the bill is brought back before the chamber where it was first introduced (either the House or the Senate) to be voted on for approval. It is then sent to the other chamber also to be voted on for approval. If approved by both chambers, the bill is sent to the President or Governor. The President or Governor can comment on the bill and then sign the bill, or refuse to sign it (veto). If signed, the bill becomes law. If vetoed, it may go back to the House and Senate for redrafting. The House and Senate can override the veto with a two-thirds majority vote in both chambers. If the President or Governor does not return the bill to Congress with her/his objections within 10 days, the bill automatically becomes a law. If the legislative session ends before that 10 day period, the bill is "pocket vetoed" (expired).

## HOW DO LOBBYISTS TARGET LEGISLATORS?

Lobbyists break legislators down into five key categories:

**THE WINNERS-** These are the legislators that are completely down for your cause. They take your concerns and information about your cause straight to their colleagues, becoming your visible "spokesperson".

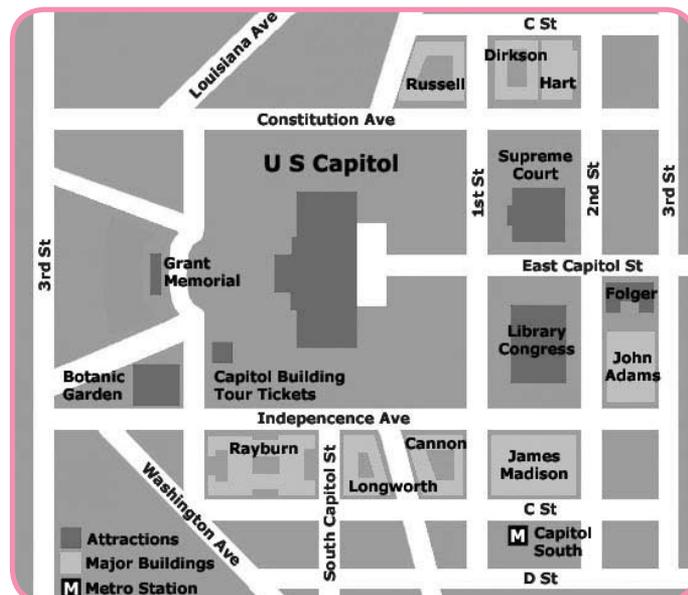
**THE BUDDIES-** Oftentimes, these legislators are already in agreement with you; they just need a little push. By providing them with more information, statistics, opinions, etc. about your cause, they will be better equipped to become a Champion for you.

**THE (FENCE)ERS-** These legislators don't agree with your cause, nor do they disagree. They can vote either way. These are the most important legislators to target when you lobby. By putting together effective persuasion with positive pressure, you will have a better chance at swaying them in your direction.

**THE "WHATEVER"S-** These legislators, if given the chance, probably won't vote for your cause. They aren't really inclined to vote for anything. In this case, you actually wouldn't want them voting at all. The key is to keep them from becoming more active since they won't agree. This can become detrimental to your cause.

**THE HARD KNOCKS-** These legislators definitely don't care about what you have to say and it will take a great deal of persuasion to get them to see your point. The key in challenging them is to tell other legislators about them, focusing on how extreme their views are on your cause, in order to get more legislators that will actually be for you to be against them.

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## MY EXPERIENCE AS A LOBBYIST

Before my first experience as a lobbyist, I had no idea what I was getting into. I was given a crash course on lobbying, a folder about what legislative act I would be lobbying for, key points, and a list of legislators from my state that were for, against, and

“whatever” to my cause. I lobbied for the Responsible Education about Life Act (also known as the REAL Act), an act that would provide federal money to support responsible sex education in schools, including science-based, medically accurate, and age appropriate public health information about both abstinence and also contraception. This bill is popular among legislators that are for sexual and reproductive issues that include comprehensive sexual education, yet those who are more conservative and are for abstinence-only education in schools are against it. There are legislators (liberate, moderate, and conservative) who have not agreed to support it.

I went to both the House of Representatives and the Senate to lobby. I was able to speak to staffers (employees of the legislators) about the REAL Act as well as staffers whose employers were against it or had no opinion on it. In my case, I came across Winners and Hard Knocks, the two extremes. Armed with my information as well as folders of information about the REAL Act to be given to the staffers, I walked the halls in amazement as well as in a “What in the world am I doing?” daze. The second time I lobbied, a year later, I was more confident about what I had to do (and I knew my way around more).

It was a great experience. There is nothing like having someone listen to my voice as well as the voice of the people from my state. I was able to share my knowledge about the REAL Act as well as personal stories about sexual education from my middle and high school years. Initially, I was afraid to come across a legislator that has voted against the REAL Act, but I didn’t let it get to me. What fun would lobbying be if all you’re coming across are legislators that agree with you? It’s easier, of course, but getting legislators to come to your side (eventually) is great.

## MY TIPS ON LOBBYING

The future of our sexual and reproductive freedom depends on what we as young women do today. Here are some tips I have learned on how to be an effective lobbyist:

**Plan ahead-** Never meet a staffer or legislator unprepared. Know your stuff but don’t overload yourself with too much information. Stick to 2-3 issues about your cause, why you’re for it, why they should be for it, and what steps can be taken to make sure they influence more legislators. If you’re lobbying with a group of people, plan out who will lead the visit and who will know what information. If they ask you a question that you cannot answer, say “I don’t have the answer, but I can find out and get in touch with you”. You can take their contact information, and when you find an answer to their question, you can email them with the answer.

**Don’t stay long-** Get your point across in a timely manner, especially if other people want to speak to the staffer/legislator. If the staffer/legislator agrees with you, great. If not, you can always schedule another visit, leaving behind information on your cause for them to read. If a legislator is in agreement with you, remember to thank them. If they are not, don’t be upset. Just know that in time, s/he may come around and support your cause.

**Remember to follow-up-** Be sure to send a thank you note or email to the staff/legislator you talked to as well as any answers to questions they might have had. ●

*Give yourself a pat on the back- Lobbying is hard work but rewarding as well. Not many people would care to even do it, but... if we don't then who will?*

## POST-ELECTION ROUNDUP: ARE THESE RESULTS ENOUGH?

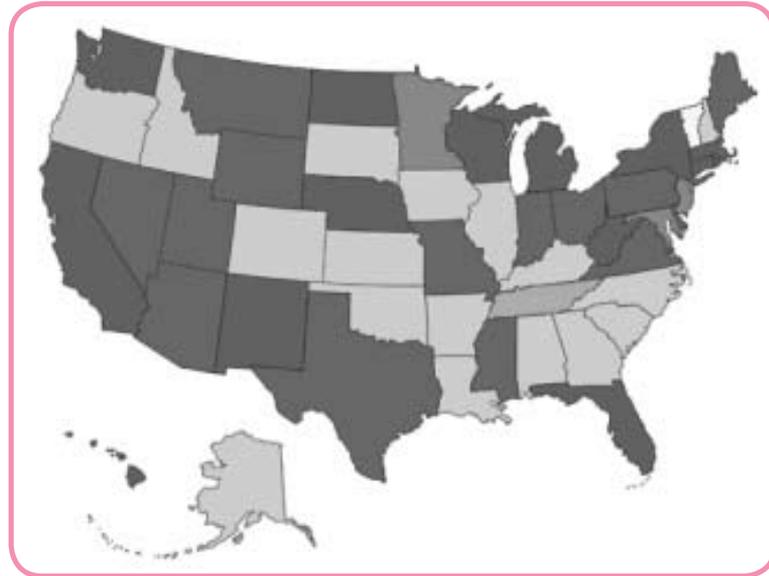
By Lindsay Swisher

Election Day can bring a variety of emotions for many people. Some people are scared, some are excited, and many simply wait in anticipation for the results people have worked so hard to achieve. This past Election Day, November 7, 2006, proved to be a successful day for those working to protect reproductive freedom.

As many of you know, the proposed abortion ban in South Dakota was a hot issue in this year's election. This ban would have outlawed abortions in any case, even to protect the life of the female/mother. It would have created the most restrictive law of any state on citizens' reproductive choices. Thankfully, the ban was defeated by 56 percent to 44 percent.

Other ballots containing abortion legislation were those in California and Oregon. Both of these ballots contained legislation that would require parents to be notified at least forty-eight hours before any minor could receive an abortion. In both of these states, this is the second time voters have stepped up and denied legislation restricting their rights.

Voters also spoke up and elected many pro-choice officials on Election Day. This strong-hold and dedication to reproductive freedom proves that citizens are tired of politicians over-stepping their boundaries and trying to restrict personal and private decisions. In five states (HI, IL, MN, NH, WV), voters helped move their State Senates from either mixed or anti-choice to pro-choice



majorities. In three states (AK, UT, WI), majorities shifted from anti-choice to mixed, however, no pro-choice state switched to an anti or mixed Senate.

Similar results can be seen in the state House elections where one state (NH) moved to a pro-choice majority, and four states (AK, NV, MN, IN) moved to mixed-choice Houses. In terms of governors, six states were able to increase their choice standing by moving to a mixed or pro-choice governor.

On a larger scale, Democrats overtook both the House and Senate in the Federal elections. Democrats now control the House of Representatives by a majority of 233 to 201 representatives. The Senate is controlled by the Democrats by a closer margin of 51 to 49.

These elections results prove

that citizens of the United States are dedicated to preserving their rights for reproductive freedom, yet it seems that politicians have no intention of minimizing the number of restrictive laws introduced on reproductive rights. Look at California where the parental notification law was the second piece of legislation introduced on that same topic in just two years. It seems that politicians may stop at nothing until the choices of citizens are taken away for good. So the question remains, how can we stop them? What must we do to prove once and for all that pro-choice voters have no intention on giving up?

The answer is simple. Stand up as voters and remove them from office. Fill our offices with politicians dedicated to preserving the rights and freedoms that the American people have worked so hard to gain. Be a voice for the issues you support, and not just a supporter. Stand up and demand change, because when we work together and stand up as one, we can achieve great changes that will last a lifetime. 

*Be a voice for the issues you support, and not just a supporter. Stand up and demand change, because when we work together and stand up as one, we can achieve great changes that will last a lifetime.*

## THE HPV VACCINE: A RARE VICTORY

*By Willo Radgens*

**H**ooray! A victory! Sorry for all the excitement, but when you are an advocate in the reproductive health and rights field, victory is all too rare. This one comes in the form of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. HPV is a sexually transmitted infection that causes genital warts and can ultimately cause cervical cancer in some women. The vaccine that will protect against the four types of HPV that account for 70% of cervical cancer and 90% of warts was approved and licensed by the FDA in June 2006.

So what does this mean to women across the globe? Well, right here in the United States it means that the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (try saying that three times fast), is recommending that it be given to all girls 11-12 years old (although it can be given as young as 9). The aim of doing it that young is to get girls immunized before they become sexually active. It is also recommended that women 13-26 years old receive the complete immunization series (3 shots) if they haven't yet. All of these recommendations are now being considered officially by the Center for Disease Control.

This vaccine could also mean incredible things in the rest of the world, particularly in developing countries. While every country has its own laws and guidelines for approving and administering vaccinations, the HPV vaccine will certainly be most beneficial to those that

can receive it. This is an excellent chance to stop the infection of women and the spread of a potentially deadly disease.

So, if you are 9-26, you should look into getting the vaccine. However, it is very important to point out that if a woman is already sexually active, the vaccine may be less effective for her, depending on whether she already has a form of HPV. This is reason 32,589,709 for everyone who is sexually active to get tested regularly.

Steer clear of the vaccination if you are pregnant or male, for now. I know, I know, why do women have to carry all of the burden? Don't worry ladies, hopefully it won't be that way for long. Studies are currently being done on boys and men to test the vaccine on them as well.

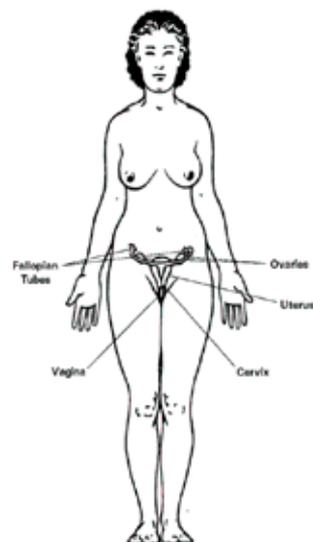
If you are lucky enough to have insurance and lucky enough to have your insurance cover the vaccine, congratulations, you are one of the few. Very few insurance companies are currently covering the vaccine, but that should change as it becomes more used, recommended, available, and required. The cost of the vaccine is \$120 per dose, so \$360 for the entire series. I know this is A LOT of money to a lot of people, but this is your health we are talking about, and it could cost a lot more later on if a more serious medical condition arises. There are also places like the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program that will cover the cost of vaccine. The VFC will provide the vaccine for those under 19 who

are uninsured, Medicaid eligible, American Indian, or Alaska native.

Hopefully the vaccine will also soon be available at clinics that can offer it on a sliding scale fee.

Even though the vaccine is extremely effective, nothing except abstinence is 100% effective. So if you are sexually active or over the age of 16, you should still get annual exams and PAP smears, the best detection of cervical cancer and other sexual health problems. Also remember that you should always use protection during sexual activity.

Whew! So that's a lot of information huh? Sorry to overwhelm you, but this is a huge deal, and I wanted you to have all the facts. Just remember this is a big victory for women's health, and for that we can be happy and healthy!!! 



**what's your normal?**

# Healthy Hannah's Advice Column: know your normal



Dear "Raise Your Voice" readers,

I have a challenge for you-- are y'all ready for it?

When I used to work in the sexual education field, we had a really common phrase we used with people. "Know your normal." We used this phrase because very often when discussing symptoms or indicators of a problem with our bodies we are looking for something different than normal. However, every body is different, so each person needs to know what normal is for her or him.

But more and more people I talked to, primarily women, didn't know what her normal was. I was recently talking with a group of friends and I realized that hardly anyone I was close to knew her normal either. What's with this?

Knowing you normal is incredibly important. Why? Because how will you know if something's wrong if you don't know where you started? And how do you find out your normal? Here is the challenge part...first off, do some exploring by yourself. Pay attention to how your body works, how it feels on a regular basis. Keep track of what you eat regularly, grab a mirror and explore what you can't see, track your cycle every month, whatever it takes for you to get in touch with how you work.



Once you have found your normal-use it! Become a healthy person by being a great patient. Go to the doctor if you haven't been in a while and just get a check up. Be honest with your doctor about what you have discovered about yourself. If you are over the age of 16 or sexually active, schedule an annual exam and PAP smear...and be honest with your gynecologist too. I know—we've all been there—sometimes it is really tough to be honest if something itches, or worse, smells. It's embarrassing! But that's what your doctor is there for. And, you can pretty much bet that they have seen and heard it all before. They'll probably teach you how to do a self-breast exam...do it every month. These simple things save lives.

As you grow older, normal may change for you, but you are the one who will always know your body best. Women of all ages—know your normal so you can be extraordinary!



Sincerely, Healthy Hannah

### *About the Pro-Choice Public Education Project*

The Pro-Choice Public Education Project (PEP) is dedicated to engaging young women on their terms around the critical issues of reproductive health and rights. Historically, the reproductive rights movement has marginalized young women, women of color, and low-income women, among other groups. PEP works to bridge the gap between organizations and diverse young women by both listening to young women's stories and by working with organizations to help them meet young women where they are.

### *About the Young Women's Leadership Council*

The mission of the Young Women's Leadership Council (YWLC) is to be the voice and raise the voices of diverse groups of young women in the sexual and reproductive health and rights movement.

## *Donate to PEP!*

Thank you for picking up *Raise Your Voice*.

If you like what you have read, we encourage you to become part of the PEP family. Please visit our website at

[www.protectchoice.org](http://www.protectchoice.org). You can join our email list, donate online, and learn much more about the work that we do for young women.



You can also send a donation via mail to:

***The Pro-Choice Public Education Project***

PO Box 3952  
New York, NY 10163

or call **1-800-253-CHOICE** for more information.

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The Pro-Choice Public Education Project (PEP) would like to extend a special thanks to the Educational Foundation of America, the General Service Foundation, the Irving Harris Foundation, the Moriah Fund, Ms. Foundation for Women, the Overbrook Foundation, the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, the Scherman Foundation, the Quixote Foundation, our Steering Committee Members and our individual donors for their generous support of PEP and our programs.