

The Prevention Agenda

In recent years, as anti-choice lawmakers have had control of Congress, they have worked relentlessly to make abortion more difficult and dangerous. Making matters worse, they do nothing to make abortion less necessary. NARAL Pro-Choice America has a longstanding policy of supporting *all* options for women – including their right to prevent unintended pregnancy.

In keeping with this principle, in January 2005 NARAL Pro-Choice America challenged President Bush and anti-choice lawmakers to unite the country by abandoning their divisive attacks on safe, legal abortion and instead devoting efforts to enacting commonsense prevention measures that reduce the *need* for abortion. We call upon all lawmakers, both pro-choice and pro-life alike, to end these attacks on a woman's right to choose and to unify the country behind policies that the public supports.¹

The pro-choice prevention agenda includes the following measures:

- The **Responsible Education About Life Act (S.611/H.R.1511)**, sponsored by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) in the 110th Congress, would establish a comprehensive sex-education program for young people. Additionally, the **Real Education for Healthy Youth Act (S.1782/H.R.3324)** also authored by Sen. Lautenberg and Rep. Lee in the 112th Congress, builds upon the REAL Act by expanding comprehensive sex education in elementary and secondary schools and universities while ensuring that federal funds are spent on effective, age-appropriate, medically accurate programs. Federal “abstinence-only” programs by law forbid discussion of contraception’s benefits in preventing pregnancy, and these programs are so controversial and prescriptive that nearly half the states even refuse to accept funds.² Thankfully, two years ago, Congress and President Obama ended two of the three federal “abstinence-only” programs and for a short time the third program sunsetted; unfortunately, anti-choice lawmakers succeeded in reviving the third program in the health-care-reform law. There is overwhelming public support for honest sex education: 99 percent of Americans believe it is appropriate for young people to have information about STDs, and 94 percent of Americans think it is appropriate to teach young people about birth control.³
- Women across America are encountering rogue pharmacists who deny them their birth control – and in some cases lecture and humiliate them in public.⁴ The **Access to Birth Control Act (S.1415/H.R.2659)**, sponsored by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), would ensure that a woman has timely access to her birth

control at the pharmacy counter, whether or not an individual pharmacist has an objection. This proposal enjoys overwhelming public support. ⁵

- America has the highest teen-pregnancy rate of any developed Western country.⁶ Sponsored by Sen. Bob Menendez and Rep. Steve Rothman in the 110th Congress, the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention, Responsibility, and Opportunity Act (S.1137/H.R.2097)** would help tackle this problem by educating teens about their risk of pregnancy, teaching them about the significant responsibilities that come with parenthood, keeping them on track in school, and helping parents discuss tough topics – like sex – with their kids.
- Americans are tired of divisive attacks on a woman’s right to choose and they want lawmakers from both sides of the abortion debate to find commonsense solutions. Rep. Tim Ryan (D-OH) – who opposes legal abortion – teamed up with pro-choice Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and other lawmakers to introduce the **Preventing Unintended Pregnancies, Reducing the Need for Abortion, and Supporting Parents Act (H.R.3312 in the 111th Congress)**. This legislation includes a variety of policy initiatives aimed at preventing unintended pregnancies, helping women bear healthy children, and supporting new parents. The bill expands access to contraception, funds honest sex-education programs, improves health-care access for low-income women and children, and extends adoption tax credits. This partnership shows that pro-choice and pro-life lawmakers can bridge the ideological divide on the question of legal abortion by working together on effective, realistic strategies that will help women and their families.

For more than three years, President Bush’s political appointees blocked the Food and Drug Administration from allowing women to obtain **emergency contraception without a prescription**. Finally, when the public’s outrage reached a crescendo, in August 2006 the FDA approved non-prescription sales for the emergency contraceptive pill Plan B[®], but only for individuals ages 18 and over. More recently, following a district court ruling, in April 2009 the FDA approved non-prescription sales of Plan B[®] for 17-year-olds, as well. Shortly thereafter, the FDA approved the first-ever generic version of Plan B[®], Next Choice[™], for over-the-counter distribution for individuals ages 17 and older.

Finally, in August 2010, the FDA approved the new emergency contraceptive ella[®]. Available by prescription only, ella[®] is safe and effective for use up to five days (120 hours) after sex. The FDA’s approval of ella[®] is an step forward for women seeking to prevent unintended pregnancy.

These decisions represent important progress for women’s reproductive health and privacy – but in order to realize emergency contraception’s full potential to prevent unintended pregnancy, policymakers need to do more. We encourage our pro-choice allies in Congress to advance the following commonsense bills:

- The **Compassionate Assistance for Rape Emergencies Act (H.R.1724)** would ensure that survivors of sexual assault are offered emergency contraception in the emergency room. Each year, thousands of women in the United States become pregnant as a result of rape. This is an added tragedy, since emergency contraception, when used correctly and consistently, can significantly reduce a woman's chances of becoming pregnant. Unfortunately, far too few women know about the medication. Sponsored by Rep. Steve Rothman (D-NJ), this legislation garners widespread public support. Polls show that nearly 80 percent of American women want their hospitals – religious-affiliated or not – to offer emergency contraception to rape survivors.⁷

- Even though some types of emergency contraception now are available without a prescription, a major hurdle continues to obstruct their use: too few women (and even doctors!) know what it is, how it works, and how to use it correctly. The **Emergency Contraception Education Act (H.R.5561)**, ([H.R.5561/S.3504](#) in the 111th Congress by Sen. Patty Murray and Rep. Louise Slaughter, would fund public-education campaigns to inform women and health-care professionals that this medication is available, and is safe and effective at preventing pregnancy.

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- ¹ Pro-choice lawmakers have authored a comprehensive list of bills that would help achieve that goal – yet disappointingly, President Bush refused to support any of them during his time in office, despite the fact that polling showed that Americans preferred prevention-based measures over his anti-choice agenda by a 61-to-27 percent margin. See NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation, *Nationwide Poll of U.S. Voters* (June 2005).
- ² SIECUS, *Federal Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Funding By State, Fiscal Year 2009* (Sept. 2010) at <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=1260> (last visited Oct. 28, 2010).
- ³ National Public Radio et al., *Sex Education in America, General Public/Parents Survey* (Jan. 2004).
- ⁴ NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation, *Who Decides? A State-by-State Report on the Status of Women's Reproductive Rights* (20th ed. 2011), at www.WhoDecides.org.
- ⁵ NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation, *Nationwide Poll of U.S. Voters* (June 2005).
- ⁶ The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *General Facts and Stats* (Nov. 2006) at <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/genlfact.asp>.
- ⁸ Belden, Russonello & Stewart, CFFC, *Religion, Reproductive Health and Access to Services: A National Survey of Women*, at 2 (2000).