

“We will build on our legislative and litigation success of 2011.”

Charmaine Yoest is the president of Americans United for Life, a pro-life organization founded in 1971. She holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Virginia and came to Americans United for Life three years ago after working as an adviser to the presidential campaign of Mike Huckabee. She also has worked as project director of the Family, Gender and Tenure Project at the University of Virginia, and as a vice president at the Family Research Council, one of the largest pro-family public policy organizations in the country.

American United for Life recently released the report “The Case for Investigating Planned Parenthood,” which led to an investigation of Planned Parenthood by the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee.

State Legislatures: Why was the Indiana vote to cut Medicaid funding for Planned Parenthood an important one?

Yoest: The law received convincing support in the legislature—which voted 66-to-32 in favor of the measure—because an overwhelming number of Americans, 72 percent in one poll, do not want their tax dollars used to fund or subsidize abortion. The debate and vote in Indiana strongly reinforced this sentiment and raised legitimate questions about whether or not Planned Parenthood affiliates in Indiana and across the nation have been misusing taxpayer dollars. Notably, Indiana was the first of nine states to take action in 2011 to eliminate or limit taxpayer funding for Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers.

SL: Do you anticipate more such legislation this year?

Yoest: Currently, one of our most popular pieces of model legislation is our new Abortion Subsidy Prohibition Act, which provides



legislators with legally sound language to prohibit virtually all potential direct and indirect use of taxpayer dollars for abortion, abortion counselling or abortion referrals.

SL: Do you think the pro-life movement has more support at the state level than in the past?

Yoest: In November 2010, Americans across the nation voted for strong pro-life candidates, and many state legislative chambers, as well as the U.S. House of Representatives, became demonstrably more pro-life. As a result, in 2011, an historic number of pro-life state laws were enacted. AUL saw 28 pieces of legislation based on its models pass. We expect this life-affirming trend to continue in 2012.

SL: What do you see as the key consequences of stopping state funding for Planned Parenthood?

Yoest: Again and again, Planned Parenthood has proven that it is not the defender of women’s rights and health that it holds itself out to be. Importantly, money that has been going to Planned Parenthood and its affiliates will now go to community health centers and other health care providers that are actually providing comprehensive care to the underserved and vulnerable. Women will receive better care and America’s true health care heroes will receive the financial support they both need and deserve.

SL: What effect do you think the debate in Congress last year over defunding Planned Parenthood had on this issue in the states?

Yoest: The U.S. House of Representatives’ February 2011 vote to defund Planned Parenthood both reflected similar actions in the states and encouraged similar state actions. Congress and state legislatures were reacting to strong support among their constituents to ensure taxpayer dollars are not funding or subsidizing abortion.

SL: What is the political strategy for the pro-life movement in the next year?

Yoest: The pro-life movement will ensure that the protection of life is a central issue in the 2012 elections. We also will build upon our legislative and litigation successes in 2011—successes that protect women from the harms and abuses inherent in abortion, that provide legal recognition and protection for the unborn, and that lay the groundwork for *Roe*'s ultimate reversal. Specifically, we will continue our work at the state level to enact common-sense and protective laws such as prohibitions on state funding of abortion and abortion providers, informed consent requirements and parental involvement mandates.

SL: How do you respond to critics who say the government should stay out of personal health decisions?

Yoest: Clearly, one effective way for the government to fulfill this mandate is for it to end taxpayer funding for abortion providers. It should not subsidize Planned Parenthood nor encourage women to patronize or Americans to support it.

Editor's note: *These interviews are part of a series of conversations with opinion leaders. They have been edited for length and clarity. The opinions expressed are those of the interviewees and not of NCSL.*

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