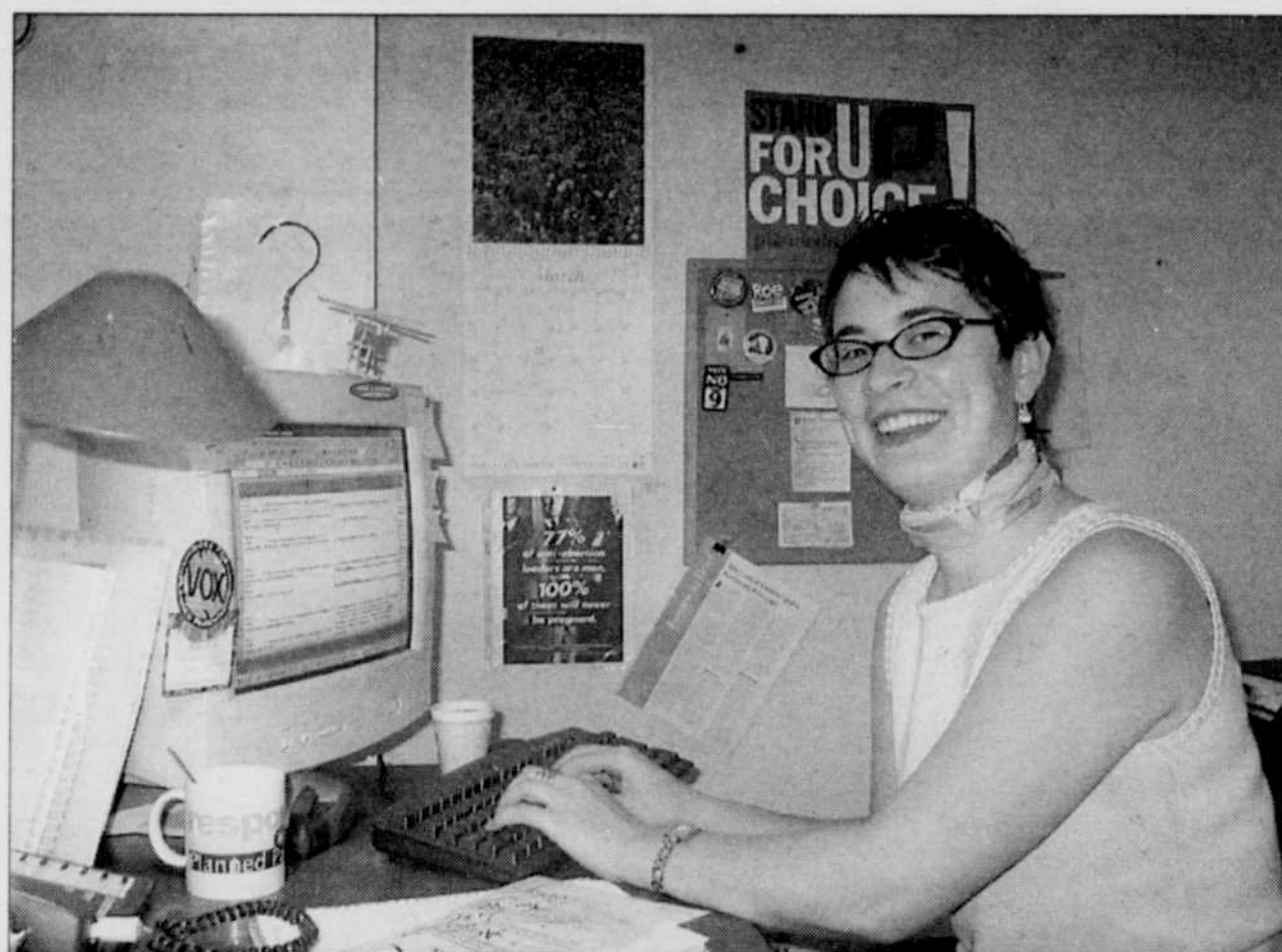




"It's quite evident whenever you walk into a pro-choice organization, you always find queer women working there"
—Carmen Schwisow

tion and expand lawsuits for health care providers. Legislators who may support these types of measures don't always vote anti-gay, going against the norm.

According to Sen. Brown, "There are some legislators who are not pro-choice but who are pro-gay rights." She says will be on the lookout for anti-choice legislators trying to trade a pro-gay bill for an anti-choice bill, as has happened in the past. "I am not willing to trade one of those issues against the other," says Brown. "That's not a palatable trade to me."

Brown gives kudos to BRO for standing by the same principle. "They are not willing to divide and conquer. They will only endorse candidates who are pro-choice."

The Human Rights Campaign in recent years has not been so meticulously scrupled. HRC's endorsement of U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Ore., has been a point of contention within the queer community.

While Smith's efforts to fight hate crimes and advance care for people with HIV/AIDS have been heralded by HRC, the organization downplayed his anti-choice stance. However, Smith's recent announcement of support for the Federal Marriage Amendment belies his commitment to the dignity of queer lives.

"I respect organizers who want to take votes where they can get them," says McFeely. However, "for me personally, choice is a litmus test."

McFeely says legislators who "force women to have back alley abortions are the same people who want to keep queers in the closet.... At the heart of this discrimination is gender."

Democracy in action

"I think it is all around the word power—and how we share power," Brown says. "Making women have babies they don't want to have, or not giving people basic employment or relationship rights, is about limiting access to power."

Claudia Harper, a "60-something" lesbian who lives in Astoria, couldn't agree more. The co-chairwoman of Oregon NARAL's Clatsop County activist team says she sees a parallel between domestic violence and limited access to choice.

Harper used to volunteer for a women's crisis hot line, and she says callers repeatedly recounted having limited or no options for empowerment and decision-making. Some women had unwanted pregnancies but did

not know where to turn or feared retribution from their abusive partners.

Working the hot line caused Harper "to see that sex can be the most beautiful thing or the most horrific thing."

In her work with Oregon NARAL, she stresses three key components of choice: access, voice and power. "If we are given access and time to acquire good information, hear diverse opinions expressed, we can learn," Harper says. "That leads to voice. We find our own voices and beliefs based on what we learned. From that we become empowered and can group with others."

"That is what democracy is," she says. Harper's colleague Rebecca Green, 31, constituency development director at Oregon NARAL, says reproductive choice is like same-sex marriage—a civil rights issue.

Green is a heterosexual woman who has pro-choice in her blood. Literally. Her grandfather, Dr. Alan Guttmacher, was the president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America from 1962 to 1974. Early in his career as an obstetrician, Guttmacher witnessed a woman die of a botched abortion and afterward vowed to fight for women's reproductive rights.

Green says anti-choice activists and legislators are trying to undo the freedoms she and her grandfather have worked to secure. "My personal opinion is that the people in government who are proactively destroying the right to choose are doing so in order to place more obstacles in front of all people who have the right to control their own destinies," says Green. "They're depriving us of the right to do what we want with our lives."

When Green joins thousands of other progressive activists later this month for the march in Washington, her grandfather will be in her heart. "I absolutely expect to feel a historical connection, not only with my grandfather but with all civil rights activists who have marched on Washington to defend human freedom. I'm proud to be taking part in a long tradition of making citizen voices heard in this way."

"It's going to be fun," McFeely says of the march. "And it will be transformative."

Kierra Johnson, development director for the national organization Choice USA, says young activists are ready to be transformed. "People often ask: 'Where are the youth? We're coming to Washington!'"

Johnson says young queer women of color have a particularly vital stake in fighting for reproductive rights. "They need access to comprehensive sexuality information and

education...access to health care...and access to abortion."

The 27-year-old says young queer women of color are "cross movement organizers" and are concerned about welfare reform, immigration issues, global issues and other matters of social justice. "We're not single-issue activists anymore."

Leaders in Oregon are also thinking about the multifaceted issues the march will represent. Sen. Brown says it will be "an opportunity...to make connections like, 'It's not OK to discriminate against someone because of their race, then maybe it's not OK to discriminate against someone because of sexual orientation.'"

Roche, who plans to attend the march, sees it as "a watershed moment for abortion rights. Folks who haven't stepped up can go to Washington, D.C., and be counted," she says.

Schwisow will attend with a Planned Parenthood delegation and is busy encouraging other women to join them. "What an incredible moment it will be to stand on the Mall with upwards of a million people...[and] tell our nation's leaders that we want change."

Oh yeah: On her lapels Schwisow will be wearing two buttons. One reads, "I'm pro-choice and I vote." The other? "30 degrees from straight." ☐

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