

Defending the Right to Protect Life



With the U.S. Capitol in the background, anti-abortion demonstrators march toward the U.S. Supreme Court during the March for Life, Friday, Jan. 20, 2023, in Washington. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

by Lee Smith

According to Shawn Carney, president of the grassroots pro-life organization 40 Days for Life, the Supreme Court's decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* was one of the greatest days in our history—for everyone but the Biden administration.

The White House is mad, Carney told me in a recent episode of ["Over the Target Live."](#)

"And they're taking their anger at the Supreme Court out on everyday peaceful Americans. And that's exactly what happened with [Mark Houck](#), who for no reason had his house raided by the

FBI at gunpoint with his seven children there. It was absurd.”

Houck is a volunteer with 40 Days for Life who was protesting at a Philadelphia [abortion](#) clinic in October 2021 when he allegedly pushed a man who was harassing his 12-year-old son. Nearly a year later, dozens of FBI agents showed up at Houck’s home, reportedly drew their weapons on him, his wife, and seven children, and charged him with violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, or FACE Act. Last week a federal court acquitted him.

“Our lawyers absolutely mopped the floor with the FBI and the DOJ in the cross-examination,” says Carney. But the story isn’t ending yet. Houck, says Carney, is going to bring legal action against the Justice Department.

“And we’re going to help him in every way we can,” says Carney, “because this is about civil rights. And this is why all Americans, whether you’re pro-abortion or pro-life, all Americans want free speech. I don’t want a pro-abortion activist to have their house raided by the FBI. That’s absurd. It’s part of the public discourse, on frankly, the most controversial topic in our country. And so it’s normal to have public debate,” Carney says. “It’s not the job of the DOJ to shut one side down because they don’t like their opinion. It’s bigotry.”

Carney explains that 40 Days for Life has previously enjoyed good relations with federal law enforcement through every administration, even during the first 18 months of the Biden White House. “Then *Roe* was overturned, and all of a sudden we were like an enemy of the state.”

Nonetheless, he notes that there are “a lot of great men and women in the DOJ and in the FBI, we talked to them, and they were rooting for Mark. They think the whole thing is absurd. The DOJ and the FBI have a lot of division internally, trust me.”

Carney founded what's now the world's largest grassroots pro-life movement nearly two decades ago. It started with a 40-day vigil outside of a Planned Parenthood in College Station, Texas, in 2004. The organization has grown exponentially since then.

"40 Days For Life has gone to now a thousand cities in 65 different countries," says Carney. The organization is effective, he says, because "it's built on what we have and the abortion industry doesn't—which is a large base of local volunteers."

The core of the mission is sidewalk outreach, speaking to women as they approach an abortion clinic for the procedure. Usually, says Carney, that's "the first person to actually connect with the woman when she gets out of a car." Houck is a sidewalk counselor. Carney explains that the organization trains volunteers "on what to say, what not to say. And often it's not very profound, usually 'Good morning, how are you? I know you don't want to be here today.'"

The organization's success is due in part to its temperament. "40 Days for Life is approachable, we're not crazy, we're not yelling at people telling them they're going to burn in hell, we're there silently; if they want to talk to us, we'll offer free medical alternatives," says Carney. "If we were judgmental, nobody would join, certainly nobody would come and ask for our help."

The pro-abortion camp, on the other hand, has become even more destructive. Carney recalls that when he first heard *Roe* was overturned, he saw a pro-abortion activist assessing the Court's decision on TV. "She said, 'I knew this day was coming. We were losing the messaging. We were pushing late-term abortion, we were pushing infanticide.'"

Carney credits her for an honest assessment. "I think a lot of that's happened in the last 25 years, but especially the last

10 years, when you have politicians saying that you can have an abortion on the day of birth. You just lose people at that.”

And that’s why the Biden administration is angry and targeting the pro-life movement. Because life is winning, says Carney. The numbers show it. Abortions are down and the birth rate is up. And according to Carney, that’s the most important reason for the organization’s success—women want to choose life.

As evidence, pro-life activists point to the Texas Heartbeat Bill. Passed in September 2021, it protects unborn children after a heartbeat is able to be detected, in some cases as early as six weeks. Texas [birth data](#) shows that in a five-month period between March 2022 and July 2022, the number of Texas births increased by more than 5,000 as compared to identical time periods from previous years.

Carney’s Texas-based organization rightly deserves some credit for the surge in life. “We’ve had a million volunteers participate in 40 Days For Life around the world. And they do so because they know that it’s effective. The former Planned Parenthood workers tell us that the no-show rate for an abortion appointment can go as high as 75 percent when we’re out there, peacefully praying, so it is detrimental to the bottom line of abortion facilities. That’s why we’ve closed 132 of them. We’ve closed abortion facilities in San Francisco and Los Angeles and Seattle and Chicago, in London, in New York.”

While the pro-abortion side of the issue typically prefers to describe itself as pro-choice, Carney’s experience shows him that, given the opportunity, resources, and support, the choice women want to make is for life.

“There’s no gratitude surrounding abortion, there’s no enthusiasm,” he says. Women “don’t want to be there. No one actually grows up wanting to work in the abortion industry

either. The doctor always had something go wrong. It wasn't his goal in medical school. And so we're really the only ones that want to be there, you know, truly, at that facility, and we're there to offer hope and healing. ... If you give women freedom, and if you give them a real choice, they'll choose life. And we see that every day."

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