

CREDO

THE INSIDE VIEW

Kristan Hawkins

Kristan Hawkins doesn't like to discuss her age, but not out of vanity. The 24-year-old wants to be sure that her right-to-life agenda is taken seriously. As the executive director at Arlington-based Students for Life of America, Hawkins and her team start and support pro-life movements on college campuses around the country. And as the mother of a young child with cystic fibrosis, she has appeared on national news and radio in opposition to current efforts to reform health care. Hawkins will speak alongside politicians and activists at the Values Voter Summit later this month in Washington, D.C. This week, she spoke with The Examiner about the source of her struggle for the sanctity of life.



Do you consider yourself to be of a specific faith?

I was born into a Christian family and we attended a nondenominational church. My husband and I now continue that same tradition with our own family. I love knowing that the folks I worship with aren't just the people I sit next to on Sundays, but they're my friends, they're the people I hang out with, the people I turn to. That's how I grew up, and it's how I want my children to grow up.

For many Americans, the abortion debate seems as if it's been all argued out. What can a new generation of right-to-life activists bring to it that hasn't already been said?

We are firsthand survivors of abortion. We know that for \$400 or \$500, our mothers could have aborted us, and many young people know their mothers had abortions before them. As far as organizing, this generation is less combative — there's an urge to get away from divisive politics. So instead of debates, you're more likely to see people invite pro-choice groups to our events, and provide them with material and say, "Will you at least support people who do choose life? We're not going to try to change your mind, but will you at least help us help women with unplanned pregnancies?"

You've been public in expressing grave concerns about efforts to reform health care, in part because they could adversely affect your son's special health needs. But does society have any sort of an obligation to provide health care to those without it?

My feelings on health care resemble those of a lot of parents of children with disabilities. I believe that all people should have access to health care, especially those with disabilities. And I believe it should be affordable, especially knowing the costs we pay for our son, and will continue to pay throughout his life. But from the parental aspect, it's the idea of rationing that worries me. Even without intending it, I fear these reforms would lead to rationed care. Everyone should have access — my Christian beliefs tell me that. But do we want to let the government be in control of that?

The fear over the idea of rationing health care seems to stem from the fear that some lives would be judged as more valuable than others. Is that a real concern?

It sometimes seems that with prenatal testing and genetic testing, we're trying to create a perfect society — and that's very frightening to me. I know it comes out of wanting to eliminate human suffering, but we need to understand that killing that person is not helping him or her. People say, "I don't want that person to be in pain," but in reality, maybe others don't want to take care of that person, or experience the pain when that person passes away. Our son's diagnosis [with cystic fibrosis] just makes the time we have with him that much more valuable. I may outlive my son. But I've never had one mother tell me that she spent too many days with her child. Even if the child dies soon after birth, there's never that question on their mind.

At your core, what is one of your defining beliefs?

There's a statement I found a while back by Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel that sums up what I believe more eloquently than I could: "There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest." That's what I do. I believe that all life is sacred, and we must do everything we can. Even if we have a bad day, we lose a court case, a horrible law passes, we have to keep fighting.

— Leah Fabel