La. abortion factions working on other issues

By The Associated Press

With abortion legislation now in the U.S. Supreme Court, people on both sides of the issue in Louisiana are shifting their focus to other issues.

In the Legislature, they are battling over some issues, but they've also found some common ground.

After the nation's most stringent abortion law passed last year, abortion rights groups promised to concentrate on issues such as prenatal care, day care center regulation, domestic violence and sex education.

"We're in the background this session, but we're still busy," said Anne Shifman, executive director of Louisiana Choice. "We can't stay idle. There's too much to do. The other side, those who opposed us on abortion, are also our opponents on day care and sex education and other issues that affect the reproductive health of women."

Shifman said they're also tracking bills concerning infertility and contraception. And, she said they're working to get more people elected to Congress this fall who will support their ideas.

Dr. Barlett, executive director of Planned Parenthood, said she's not surprised to see Rep. Thieriot fight against dismantling Louisiana's dual licensing system for day care centers or Eagle Forum spokesman spokesman Sandy McRae opposing expansions in sex education.

Jenkins, a staunch anti-abortion advocate, is a floor leader for fundamentalist religious groups opposed to state regulation of church-run day care centers. He's also fought expansion of sex education and making birth control available to students.

"It's one of the things I'm concerned about," Jenkins said. "I try to protect an individual's liberties. I've always been very concerned that parents have choices and the right to choose for their children."

Although deeply divided over day care and sex education, Jenkins said he's found common ground in the extent to which sex education should be taught in Louisiana schools, the two sides from last year's abortion wars have come together on a couple of bills.


One would let pregnant girls, regardless of their age, have access to sex education classes. Another would allow inclusion of information on state child support laws in sex education classes.

"In order to try and reduce abortions, we've got to reduce teen pregnancies. We've got to try and do what we can to teach the perils of pregnancy and the destruction it can do to your life if you're not ready for it," Thieriot said. "We need to teach abstinence and obligation, then we can work at getting to the root of the problem."

That goes for boys as well as girls, he said.

"It's the young men that realized that they're obligated and can't just have fun and walk away from a catastrophe," he said. "But we've got to develop a consciousness that we're accountable for our actions. We need to develop an appreciation for practicing moral, sound and reasonable judgment."

Several abortion rights groups also backed the Flournoy bills. And Jenkins didn't just vote for them, he signed on as a co-author for one of them.