

40 UNDER 40

CLASS OF 2016

Photography by Stephen J. Serio

SHAUNA PREWITT

34 | Associate

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As a young lawyer in Chicago's Skadden office, Shauna Prewitt spearheaded a national lobbying campaign to curtail rapists' parental rights. It grew out of her own experience: As a college student, she was sexually assaulted and became pregnant, then had to battle her attacker in court for custody of her daughter. Her campaign to change state laws started six years ago when only 16 states had legislation addressing the issue; now 40 jurisdictions do, including Illinois.

CRAIN'S: In 2012, then-U.S. Rep. Todd Akin made his remarks that women couldn't get pregnant from "legitimate rape." What was your reaction?

PREWITT: At that point in time, I had worked in a couple of different states to try to pass laws, and I had been increasingly frustrated by some of the questions I received from legislators. Things like, "Why would a woman who was raped ever want to raise a child that she conceived in rape?" I found it offensive. "Why would a man who really raped ever want to exercise custody rights over a child?" And my fear, upon reading Akin's comments, was that my third question was going to be, "Wait a minute, I thought if a woman was really raped, legitimately raped, her body 'shut that whole process down,' and she couldn't get pregnant." So I spent two days writ-



ing this open letter that just allowed me to exorcise all my frustrations. It ended up blowing up in a way that I didn't imagine was possible.

What was the point when you realized it had truly grabbed the public's attention?

Probably two hours after I posted it, and I got a call from Katie Couric.

What's next?

I'm on the partner track now; we'll see where that takes me. But I've also been approached about considering a run for office. It's something that I've given some consideration to.

When you're not working in Skadden's litigation and investigations practice, what are you up to?

One of the things that I got my daughter hooked on, which I really like to do, is cliff jumping. By day I am "Skadden Associate," very professional, but on vacation I try to find the biggest cliff I can to dive right off of. —Claire Bushey