



## ABSTINENCE DRAWS FIRE FROM CONDOM CROWD

*Rep. Waxman shoots at abstinence-only curricula, but shots go wild.*

A recent report, "The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs," prepared for Rep. Henry Waxman (D-California) by his staff, takes shots at abstinence programs in an attempt to discredit them. In light of the recent increase (39 percent) in federal funding for abstinence, this is not a surprise, coming from someone who is an ardent advocate of comprehensive sex education for children. Waxman released his report with much hoopla in the press, which eagerly devours anything that discredits a conservative common-sense answer to teen pregnancy and the escalation of sexually transmitted diseases among our kids. However, just as he accuses abstinence-only programs of tweaking the facts, Rep. Waxman's staff has ignored some facts in his fear-based reaction to a meager increase in abstinence funding.

Comprehensive sex-education programs, which promote condom usage, have received the lion's share (\$12 to \$1) of federal funding. The concept of more money going to educating minors on protecting themselves from unwanted pregnancies and lifelong sexually transmitted diseases by remaining abstinent until marriage is odious to those who support the condom "safety net" for teen promiscuity.

### Ignored by the Waxman report:

The Waxman report failed to mention a new study by the Heritage Foundation that tracked teenagers who took an "abstinence pledge" for four years and compared them with teens who had not. The study found that after three separate periods of analysis spaced years apart, the participants in the pledge were **one-third less likely** to have sex before the age of 18. In addition, the Waxman report failed to mention the January 2004 Zogby report (as reported in another *Family Concerns*) whereby parents (1004 across the nation) overwhelmingly supported (96 percent) the idea that abstinence is best for children. Only 39 percent thought that abstinence and contraception should be combined in a single class. Most thought that if contraception were taught at all it should be taught separately and only as an adjunct.

Texas health textbooks (three out of four) reflect this mandate from parents and teach abstinence-only with "controversial subject matter [contraception]" placed in supplemental material. The "condom crowd" complains that leaving out contraception will lead to "dangerous repercussions," according to Dan Quinn, a spokesman for the Texas Freedom Network, a self-appointed watchdog group that bills itself as an alternative to conservative groups promoting abstinence.

### Waxman report has errors and inaccuracies

The Heritage Foundation just released its report (<http://www.heritage.org/research/welfare/wm615.cfm?renderforprint=1>) in which inaccuracies and errors in the Waxman report are cited. Some of their findings include the following:

- Teenage depression: A 2003 Heritage analysis found that:
  - sexually active girls are more than three times as likely to be depressed than girls who are not sexually-active.
  - sexually active boys are twice as likely to be depressed.
  - sexually active girls are three times more likely to attempt suicide.
  - sexually active boys are eight times more likely to attempt suicide.
- The Waxman report claims that there are no studies that show the effectiveness of abstinence education. However . . .
  - There are currently 10 evaluations showing the effectiveness of abstinence education, with four being published in peer-reviewed journals. [Robert Rector, "The Effectiveness of Abstinence Education Programs in Reducing Sexual activity Among Youth," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1533, April 8, 2002.]
  - Increased abstinence is the major cause of declining birth and pregnancy rates among teenage girls (67 percent for girls ages 15-19). [*Adolescent and Family Health*, Vol. 3, Issue 1(April 2003), p. 39-47.]
  - A similar finding was released in the August 2004 *Journal of Adolescent Health* in which there was a 53 percent decline in pregnancy rates for 15-17 year olds, which was larger than the decline attributed to contraceptive use.
  - The Centers for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows a decrease in the number of teens who are sexually active (1991-2003) from 54.1 percent to 46.7 percent.

### Comprehensive Sex Education educates kids to do what?

Most comprehensive sex-education programs contain explicit material that is deeply offensive to parents and may desensitize kids and reduce their inherent modesty. Most of these programs have little mention of abstinence, devoting on average only 4.7 percent of their page content to abstinence. Even then it is often used in conjunction with condom use. The message is "Abstinence is probably best, but we know you can't do that, so put on a condom." Out of 942 pages reviewed by The Heritage Foundation, not one single sentence was found urging students to abstain from sexual activity through high school, even though the Zogby poll found that 91 percent of parents want that message given to their children.

### What do we want for our children?

The question to ask ourselves: Should the government be spending money to keep our kids absolutely safe or should we be encouraging them to "feel safe" when in fact there are many negative aspects of early sexual activity that put our kids at physical, emotional, spiritual and financial risk?