

<http://www.gazetteonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080111/NEWS/937423394/1006/news>

Initiative targets unintended pregnancies in state

By Erika Binegar
The Gazette
erika.binegar@gazettecommunications.com

CEDAR RAPIDS — Although educating young adults about safe sex can be uncomfortable, said former Iowa first lady Christie Vilsack on Thursday, it's an essential step to reducing unintended pregnancies in Iowa — which were 50 percent of pregnancies in 2006.

Vilsack launched the \$1.5 million Iowa Initiative to Reduce Unintended Pregnancies to educate Iowans about contraception and increase access to family planning services. The initiative is supported by the Susan Thompson Buffet Foundation and a 10-person board.

Iowa ranks 48th in the United States in access to family planning services and 39th in public funding for such services. "We need to put a dent in those numbers," Vilsack said.

Vilsack said plans are to use research from the University of Northern Iowa to market to 18- to 30-year-old Iowans and organizers hope to travel the state to educate women and men on safe sex practices.

The initiative falls under what Vilsack called her lifelong commitment: empowering women. She said Thursday she hopes it will become a model for reducing unintended pregnancies that can be adopted in other states.

She spoke of her husband, former Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack — who was put up for adoption by his then- 23-year-old biological mother — as an example of how such pregnancies can affect people through generations.

Lee Clancey, Cedar Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce president and CEO, said she joined the project as a board member because she's concerned about financial cuts for government-funded family planning and child services in Iowa and wants to help women take control of their reproductive lives.

Clancey, a former Cedar Rapids mayor, said she broached the topic of safe sex with her three sons by placing an economy-sized box of condoms in a closet for their use, and asking them not to be stupid. "As a parent, you have to talk about it," she said.