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"Initiative aimed at reducing unwanted pregnancies"

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A new effort is under way to curb unplanned pregnancies and, as a result, reduce abortion in Iowa.

Low-income women in Iowa should have the same options for birth control as better-off women, said Christie Vilsack, a Democrat and former first lady.

On Thursday, Vilsack launched a statewide project called "Iowa Initiative to Reduce Unintended Pregnancies" that will focus on women ages 18 to 30.

"As a woman, as a teacher, as a mother, I believe we have a responsibility to give all women in our state the knowledge and the means to prevent unintended pregnancies," she said.

Half of all pregnancies in Iowa in 2006 were unintended, Vilsack said, citing state Department of Public Health statistics. Of those, 14 percent ended in terminations, she said, citing Iowa Barriers to Prenatal Care Project statistics.

Iowa ranks 48th in the nation in making family planning services available and 39th in its public funding for those efforts. More than half of Iowa's counties do not have family planning centers, Vilsack said.

Vilsack said she won't personally lobby the Legislature for more money for family planning, including birth control, but wants to encourage Iowans to do that.



The Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, named for the deceased wife of Omaha billionaire Warren Buffett, pitched the idea to Vilsack in October, when she was in the midst of campaigning for Hillary Clinton.

With the caucuses over, this is Vilsack's new cause. The foundation hired her as the executive director of the Iowa Initiative and is providing a \$1.5 million budget for the first year.

Its board members are Jim Autry, Mary Stier, Tom Temple, Lee Clancey, Elizabeth Dille, Susan Knapp, Alba Perez, Louise Porter, Maggie Tinsman and Dr. Andrea McGuire.

"I don't like abortion, but women should have that choice, in my view," Autry, a former Meredith publishing executive, said Thursday. "The best way to prevent abortion is to prevent unintentional pregnancy."

McGuire, a Des Moines insurance executive, said: "We're certainly not against abstinence, but we're for things that work."

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