

Former Iowa First Lady Vilsack Travels State To Promote Program To Reduce Unplanned Pregnancies

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Former Iowa first lady Christie Vilsack is traveling throughout the state to discuss unplanned pregnancies and ways to reduce their numbers in Iowa, which ranks 43rd in the U.S. in family planning funding and 48th in access to contraception, the [Daily Gate City](#) reports (Iutzi, *Daily Gate City*, 7/18).

In January, Vilsack launched the [Iowa Initiative To Reduce Unintended Pregnancies](#), which aims to educate women ages 18 to 30 about their contraceptive options and raise awareness among all state residents about the lack of family planning funding, with the idea of encouraging action among leaders including state lawmakers. The group does not plan to lobby directly for increased state family planning funding. Instead, the initiative aims to use social marketing techniques developed by a [University of Northern Iowa](#) researcher to increase awareness and encourage action among state leaders ([Daily Women's Health Policy Report](#), 1/11).

"Unplanned pregnancy affects all of us, not only taxpayers, but also social networks," Vilsack said, adding, "If women don't have access to birth control, it changes not only the woman's life, but her parents' and grandparents' lives." According to the *Daily Gate City*, teenage pregnancies cost Iowa \$47 million annually. Although there are no financial figures for unplanned pregnancies among women ages 18 to 30, in 2006, more than 50% of the pregnancies in that age group were unplanned. "This is a problem we can do something about," Vilsack said, adding, "It requires community response. If you're not willing to talk about it in a public place, it's like a sin of omission. We want to try and move these numbers. And this also is about taking care of the least among us, taking care of the most vulnerable."

Vilsack emphasized five areas that the program will use to try to reduce unplanned pregnancies: research to keep track of the program and measured results; equipping hairdressers with information to share with their clients about taking responsibility and control over their lives; dispensing information by means of Hispanic soap operas broadcast over the radio; use of Internet networking Web sites such as Facebook and MySpace; and advocacy, including talking to legislators about supporting the endeavor.

The *Daily Gate City* reports that Planned Parenthood and similar women's health organizations are being provided with funds to train more nurse practitioners, pay them higher wages, add more nurse practitioners to clinics and expand opportunities for access to birth control. "We've been opening clinics on Main Street Iowa," Vilsack said, adding, "We need to get the word out about birth control. We have a problem here with educating people." Vilsack added that she wants Iowa to become a model of how to reduce unplanned pregnancies for the rest of the country. She said, "[B]ottom line, if you reduce the number of unintended pregnancies, you reduce the need for abortions" (*Daily Gate City*, 7/18).

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