

June 7, 2007 - Slaughter Speaks on Prevention First Act at National Press Club

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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"By emphasizing prevention first, this legislation will help protect women's reproductive health, reduce unintended pregnancies, decrease the spread of STDs, and give women the tools they need to make the best decisions possible for themselves," said Rep. Slaughter in her remarks.

BACKGROUND:

The Prevention First Act (H.R. 819) was originally introduced in the 108th Congress by Rep. Slaughter as a way to change the debate on abortion by focusing on preventing unintended pregnancies. In both the 109th and 110th Congress, Rep. Slaughter reintroduced this bipartisan piece of legislation. Sen. Reid has introduced an identical senate companion bill.

The Prevention First Act is an omnibus family planning and women's health initiative that seeks to expand access to preventive reproductive health care services and education programs, help reduce unintended pregnancies, prevent the spread of STDs, and reduce the need for abortion. The Prevention First Act combines eight bills into one complete legislative package that will increase access to contraception and family planning services.

- Title I: authorizes \$700 million in funding for Title X women's clinics.
- Title II: requires private health plans to cover FDA-approved prescription contraceptives and related medical services.
- Title III: directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop and disseminate information about emergency contraception (EC) to the public and to health care providers.
- Title IV: requires that hospitals receiving federal funds provide victims of sexual assault with information and access to EC.
- Title V: provides annual funding to public and private entities to establish or expand teenage pregnancy prevention programs.
- Title VI: requires federally funded programs that provide information on the use of contraceptives to ensure that the information is medically accurate and includes health benefits and failure rates.
- Title VII: strengthens Medicaid coverage of family planning services, by ensuring that services remain accessible to low-income women; and requires states to extend coverage for family planning services and supplies to women who would be entitled to Medicaid funded prenatal, labor, delivery and postpartum care if they became pregnant.
- Title VIII: provides for comprehensive, medically accurate sex education programs that teach young people about abstinence, health and contraceptives.

TEXT OF SPEECH :

Good afternoon! Let me start off by thanking our host, the National Press Club, as well as Communications Consortium Media Center and Kathy Bonk for their work in putting this event together, and well as Donna Hall, President of the Women Donors Network.

And I would also like to thank all of you for coming this afternoon. We still have a long way to go to ensure every woman across the country has easy and affordable access to contraception while also being given the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. But your attendance here today reminds us all that none of us are alone in the fight to make that a reality.

Why Prevention First, and why now?

Ladies and Gentlemen, today the U.S. has one of the highest rates of unintended pregnancies among industrialized nations. Each year, half of the three million pregnancies nationwide are unintended. Half of those pregnancies, in turn, end in abortion.

Today, 1 in 3 girls in America become pregnant before the age of 20. The vast majority of those pregnancies are unintended.

Additionally, the U.S. has one of the highest rates of sexually transmitted diseases among industrialized nations, with the Center for Disease Control now reporting that treatment for STD infections costs our country \$15.5 billion each year. Nearly half of new STD cases are among people ages 15-24, even though these youth make up only a quarter of the sexually active population.

So, after realizing this, if we ask ourselves why Prevention First, and why now, then the answer should be as clear as day. If we want to reduce the number of abortions and the spread of STDs in this country, we must empower women through education and access to contraception.

And that is precisely what the Prevention First Act does.

I first introduced this legislation in the 108th Congress as a revolutionary approach to reducing unintended pregnancies. The Prevention First Act serves as an innovative and comprehensive way to protect women's reproductive health, decrease the spread of STDs, and reduce the number of unintended pregnancies - and it achieves this goal by providing comprehensive access to all forms of contraception and sex education.

Today marks the 42nd anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision *Griswold v. Connecticut* which effectively legalized the right of women to access contraception. This decision was groundbreaking. It set the precedent for women to take control over their own bodies and to choose the size and spacing of their family. Make no mistake: access to contraception single-handedly improved women's equality in American Society.

But throughout the years, prominent conservatives have sought to limit women's rights and freedoms by imposing stricter penalties and enacting laws to criminalize doctors and women.

At the same time, these leaders have done next to nothing to ensure that millions of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases are prevented in the first place. In fact, they have time and again done just the reverse. Clearly, if they are opposed to abortion, they should be for preventing unintended pregnancies. It's just plain common sense.

That is why for most women, including women who want to have children, contraception is not an option; it is a basic health care necessity. Contraceptive use saves scarce public health dollars. For every \$1 spent on providing family planning services, an estimated \$3.80 is saved in Medicaid expenditures for pregnancy-related and newborn care.

Many poor and low-income women cannot afford to purchase contraceptive services and supplies on their own. About 1 in 5 women of reproductive age were uninsured in 2003, and that proportion has increased by 10% since 2001. Half of all women who are sexually active, but do not want to get pregnant, need publicly funded services to help them gain access to public health programs like Medicaid and Title X.

These programs provide high-quality family planning services and other preventive health care, such as pap smears, to uninsured or underinsured individuals who may otherwise lack access to health care and alternative options for birth control. Each year, publicly funded family planning services help prevent an estimated one million unplanned pregnancies and 630,000 abortions.

Unfortunately, these programs are struggling to meet the growing demand for subsidized family planning services without corresponding increases in funding. I am pleased to say that the Prevention First Act authorizes increased funding for Title X clinics and strengthens states' coverage of Medicaid family planning services.

Improved access to emergency contraception also goes a long way toward reducing the staggering rates of unintended pregnancy and abortion in this country. If taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex, emergency contraception can prevent 89 percent of unintended pregnancies. The Alan Guttmacher Institute estimates that increased use of EC accounted for up to 43 percent of the total decline in abortion rates between 1994 and 2000. In addition, emergency contraception is often the only contraceptive option for the 300,000 women who are reported to be raped each year.

Even with the recent FDA decision to allow emergency contraception to be sold over-the-counter to women 18 years of age and over, many do not know about emergency contraception and many others still face insurmountable barriers in accessing this important product. To that end, the Prevention First Act mandates that the Secretary of Health and Human Services implement an education campaign about emergency contraception. It also requires that hospitals receiving federal funds provide victims of sexual assault with information and access to emergency contraception.

Despite the fact that contraceptives have a proven track record of enhancing the health of women and children, preventing unintended pregnancy, and reducing the need for abortion, far too many insurance policies exclude this vital coverage.

While most employment-related insurance policies in the United States cover prescription drugs in general - with some even covering the price of Viagra - many do not include equitable coverage for prescription contraceptive drugs and devices. Although 21 states now have laws in place requiring insurers to provide contraceptive coverage if they cover other prescription drugs, 29 states still do not have any laws.

Out of pocket expenses for contraception can be costly. Women of reproductive age currently spend 68% more in out-of-pocket health care costs than men, much of which is due to reproductive health-related supplies and services. To remedy this problem, the Prevention First Act requires that private health plans cover FDA-approved prescription contraceptives and related medical services.

I spoke earlier of the frightening statistic that one in three girls under the age of twenty becomes pregnant. Recent studies have shown that around sixty percent of teens have sex before graduating high school. Teen mothers are less likely to complete high school, are more likely to perform poorly in school, and are at greater risk of abuse and neglect. Their children are more likely to have low birth weights, as well.

But consider that teens who receive comprehensive sex education that includes discussion of contraception as well as abstinence are more likely than those who receive abstinence-only messages to delay sex, to have fewer partners, and to use contraceptives when they do become sexually active. Nearly half of new STD cases occur among people ages 15 to 24, even though this age bracket makes up just a quarter of the sexually active population. Efforts by conservatives to restrict access to family planning services and promote abstinence-only education programs actually jeopardize adolescent health and run counter to the views of many mainstream medical groups.

We must break the unfounded and inaccurate stereotype that improving access to contraceptive services and information causes non-sexually active teens to start having sex. Instead, teens need information to help them both postpone sexual activity and to protect themselves if they do become sexually active. A November 2006 study of declining pregnancy rates among teens concluded that the reduction in teen pregnancy between 1995 and 2002 is primarily the result of increased use of contraceptives.

The Prevention First Act provides funding to public and private entities to promote the establishment or expansion of their teenage pregnancy prevention programs. The bill also provides for comprehensive, medically accurate sex education programs that teach young people about abstinence, health, and contraceptives. Moreover, Prevention First requires federally funded programs that distribute information on the use of contraceptives to ensure that the information is

medically accurate and includes health benefits and failure rates.

Reducing unintended pregnancy and infection with STDs are important public health goals. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention included family planning in their published list of the "Ten Great Public Health Achievements in the 20th Century."

The Prevention First Act will improve access to family planning services for all women in need, and will go a long way in fulfilling the promise of this important public health achievement.

By emphasizing prevention first, this legislation will help protect women's reproductive health, reduce unintended pregnancies, decrease the spread of STDs, and give women the tools they need to make the best decisions possible for themselves.

I thank you all for attending the event today, and for your unwavering vigilance on behalf of our nation's women.

Thank you.

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