

TEENAGE PREGNANCY, A CONCERN FOR EVERYONE IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I will be brief, but I did want to join in the participation of what we have seen here tonight.

I am the cochair person of the Congressional Advisory Committee to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. But I think we all should be cochairs of that. I think that is a subject of huge importance to everybody in America today.

We still in America have the highest rate of teen pregnancy, higher than some of the Third World countries, in the world, which is pretty amazing when we consider the advances which have been made in American society in so many other ways, because I consider this to be, frankly, a high negative.

We are doing better. Our statistics in the last 3 or 4 years indicate that we are starting to go down in the rate of teenage pregnancy. It is a tremendous problem, obviously, because we have a lot of unwed very young mothers with absolutely no income sources whatsoever; with young men out there who do not have a clue about how to do anything about a family, or earn any income or whatever it may be. So it is almost a direct descent into some sort of economic help from the government in the form of welfare or something else.

In fact, the statistics are something like that if you graduate from high school and you wait until 20 to get married and you never have a criminal record, the chances are something like 80 percent you will never be in poverty. But if indeed any of those things happen, if you get pregnant early or do not graduate from high school or have a criminal record, the chances are almost overwhelming that you are going to live in poverty at some time during the course of your life.

So it is very evident, with perhaps a few exceptions, it is evident that we are all far better off if we indeed wait with respect to the concept of giving birth and getting pregnant. Obviously, I guess we would preach abstinence first.

That has a lot of good tones to it in terms of what it means in the sense that you do not have any of the mental concerns of having been sexually involved, and of course you are going to prevent disease because you have not been involved, and obviously no pregnancies are going to take place. But at some point it often goes beyond that with our young people, and they do get involved.

At that point we need to talk about planning and contraceptives. I think we have a more open approach. The idea is to avoid pregnancy. By avoiding pregnancy, you avoid all of those problems, and of course avoid the horrible problem of abortion, which is something that is abhorred by practically

everybody in the country, whether they are pro-choice or pro-life.

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So we have to do these things. I see it. I see it in my State of Delaware. I have seen it in Dover High School at a wellness center just last week, last Friday. I talked to four or five kids who are going through programs there to help deal with the subject of pregnancy. They are talking with each other.

We have wellness programs in all but one high school in the State of Delaware now that we did not have before. They have sessions in which they can actually get together and begin to talk about these issues.

That is why I think we are starting to make an impact with respect to the rate of teen pregnancy in the United States of America, which again is a positive sign. But there are still, as I said, other things that we have to do to continue to build on this recent record of success.

So I know a lot of the Members of Congress are vitally interested in this subject, and we thank them for their time and attention on it. Hopefully, the public will weigh in as well. If we do, we can prevent a lot of the hardship, a lot of the problems, a lot of the stress and strain on individuals and families that occur in this country because of teenage pregnancy that takes place across the United States. I think we can do it, and I am pleased to help be a part of this effort.

TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. CAPPS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pledge my full support to efforts across this country to reduce teen pregnancy. It is a pleasure to speak today in cooperation with my colleagues, the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE), the gentlewoman North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON), the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA), all of us working here in the Congress on this goal.

Before I came here, I spent 20 years working as a school nurse in my community of Santa Barbara, California, in the central coast. During that time, for a large portion of that time, I was the director of a program at one of our largest high schools for teen parents and their children. So I know about this topic firsthand.

This program, which I fully support, encourages teenage parents, both mothers and fathers, to stay in school for their own success and the success of their young families. It provides child care, parenting education, gives them access to support services in addition to a high school diploma and further. It is a strong intervention program.

While I was with these young moms and dads, I learned firsthand the struggles that they face on a daily basis to survive and to make something of their lives. It turns out that teenage parents are some of the strongest advocates for preventing teen pregnancy. They did and do this still in my community in a very dramatic and loving way with their peers.

They know that prevention is the key, and parents are the key to prevention. Parents need to be reminded, we all do as parents, that, first and foremost, parental guidance is the best deterrent for teenage pregnancy. Teens want to learn and hear more at home. They want to hear about values and have value role models for them in their homes and to have personal responsibility discussed.

We need to work as a community to prevent teen pregnancy with child care programs and after school programs so that our teens are busy and engaged and their energy is used in productive, supervised activities. Most importantly, we need to give them goals for the future.

Class reduction in our schools is a good thing for preventing teen pregnancy. So are partnerships that I have seen in my community between businesses and our schools that provide mentorship that light a fire in the students and give them motivation to know that they have a future for themselves and they can begin to set meaningful goals.

Some want adults in the community to talk with them about their goals and to support them in reaching these goals. This is really good pregnancy prevention that I watched and was part of firsthand.

I am very proud of all that the PACE center has achieved, the teen parent program that I was so much involved with so long and from whom I learned so much, and that these programs are alive and well and thriving in my community.

I strongly support them and other groups around the country that work with young parents helping them to keep their lives on track and teaching them to be nurturing and good parents.

But I look forward to the time when we will not need so many of these programs. We know now as we have watched pregnancy prevention programs and parents and communities, religious leaders working together that our teenage pregnancy rate has declined. But we must continue to strive.

That is why I am so pleased to be the newest member actually of the House Advisory Panel for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. We have a job to do here in Congress, and my colleagues have spoken to this today.

It is an honor for me to be a cosponsor of the Teen Pregnancy Reduction Act by pulling together the best of ideas from around the country, interactions in our communities with young people taking the lead, and their families and community leaders, the ideas