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Expectations high for panel targeting teen pregnancy ; Critics fear emphasis on condoms

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Leaders of a new national campaign against teen pregnancy say they plan to reduce the teen-pregnancy rate by one-third by 2005, although they're not sure how.

"We're starting with a great deal of optimism, but not a great knowledge base," says Thomas Kean, former governor of New Jersey and chairman of the new National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

Critics surveying the 17-member board of directors of the new group expect another national push for contraceptives for kids.

"Every single person on [the board] leans more to a mixed message of 'use a condom' than the message of 'exercise self-control and abstain from sex until you're married,'" said Christine O'Donnell, spokeswoman for Concerned Women for America, a conservative family-advocacy group.

"We have the solution [to teen pregnancy]," Miss O'Donnell added. "We know if we all band together and tell these kids that it's OK to say 'no' - and not only is it OK, it is the best choice for them - we would see a great turnaround."

"I think that many of us have a prejudice toward abstinence," Mr. Kean said, when asked about how the campaign would deal with competing views on abstinence, sex education and condoms.

However, the campaign, in its mission statement, promises to be "inclusive."

"[N]o single approach to reducing teenage pregnancy has been shown to be effective in all situations, and tolerance for a variety of reasonable strategies is essential," it said.

The teen-pregnancy issue, the statement noted, "often attracts strong feelings and strident disagreements."

The campaign against teen pregnancy claims its origins in President Clinton's 1995 State of the Union pronouncement that teen pregnancy is "our most serious social problem."

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Meetings of leaders in government, media, entertainment, youth and pregnancy-related programs, academia, social science, research, foundations and religious circles produced an agreement that a public campaign was needed - but that it should be independent of government, nonpartisan and privately funded.

News of the campaign was unveiled at the White House on Jan. 29, when Mr. Clinton announced that Dr. Henry W. Foster Jr., the former candidate for surgeon general, would act as an unpaid adviser and liaison between the group and the White House.

The campaign has an office at the Urban Institute in Northwest Washington, is a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization and is trying to raise \$4 million for its projects for the first three years.

"We're making good progress" and should be ready for a public launch in two- to three months, Urban Institute senior fellow Isabel V. Sawhill, the campaign's president, said last week.

The campaign has established task forces with several goals, including:

- * Reducing the **teen**-pregnancy rate by one-third by 2005. (In 1991, the pregnancy rate for girls age 15-17 was 74.6 per 1,000. Among the under-15 group, it was 6.3 pregnancies per 1,000 girls in 1980, 6.9 by 1985 and 7.1 by 1990, according to a federal report published in yesterday's Journal of the American Medical Association.)

- * Acquiring more accurate and complete data on **teen** pregnancy and effective interventions.

- * Identifying and repeating programs that are successful in reducing **teen** pregnancy.

- * Getting national, state and local leaders to take a stand against **teen** pregnancy.

- * Getting the media to promote the message.

- * Leading a national discussion on what role religion, culture and public values have in the **teen**-pregnancy issue.

"We are taking the stand that **teen**-age pregnancy is wrong - that it hurts not only the **teen**-ager who gets pregnant, but it hurts some young man who participated . . . and it's tragic for the baby that results," says Mr. Kean, who is president of Drew University in Madison, N.J.

One task force will look at how to get leaders "to simply take a stand . . . and come out and say this is unacceptable behavior," he said.

Another task force will look for programs that have measurable success in reducing **teen** pregnancy and can be replicated.

"We don't care whether they're run by the church or the communities. We just want to know what's been effective," Mr. Kean says.

William Galston, a former domestic-policy adviser for the Clinton administration, will lead the task force on religion and values; Kristin A. Moore, executive director of Child Trends Inc., will lead the panel on research

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and effective programs; and Barbara Huberman of Advocates for Youth will handle the state and community coalitions team.

A media task force will focus on getting out public service announcements and influencing programming changes, Miss Sawhill says. Jody Greenstone Miller, senior vice president of Americast, a Disney-affiliated company in Los Angeles, will head up that effort.

"There are as many as three examples of gratuitous sex an hour on some [TV] shows," Mr. Kean says. Such shows give the impression that sex has no consequences and "we'd like to enlist the media to address that."

Still, some of the campaign's themes worry conservative observers.

Its mission statement, for example, says it will try to "prevent **teen** pregnancy by supporting values and stimulating actions that are consistent with a pregnancy-free adolescence."

One obvious way to reduce pregnancies is to have more abortions, which is neither a desirable outcome nor a solution to the problem, several observers said.

"Our hope would be that they would look beyond **teen** pregnancy to **teen** sexual activity as they look at programs as answers to this terrible problem," says Kristi Hamrick, spokeswoman for the Family Research Council, which promotes abstinence.

Research has shown that the "two best indicators" that **teens** will delay onset of sexual activity have been parental involvement and an active religious faith, she said.

"From our point of view," Mrs. Hamrick said, "the worst thing that could happen would be for us to throw away all the good working models [for pregnancy prevention] in favor of a knee-jerk condom-distribution plan. I certainly hope that's not where they're going."

The 17-member board is complete for the moment, but the campaign expects to eventually have a "prestigious national board of 25 to 30 members," a parent-advisory board and **teen**-advisory panel.

Board members who have taken public positions on issues related to pregnancy include:

* Former Surgeon General Dr. C. Everett Koop, who has opposed abortion but supported condoms as a way to prevent AIDS.

* Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, Kansas Republican, who is viewed as being an abortion-rights supporter.

* Actress **Whoopi** Goldberg, who had her first abortion at the age of 14, had six or seven by the age of 25 and has said birth-control pills did not work for her.

Actress Jane Fonda, who began the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention in Atlanta, is not on the board, Mr. Kean says, "but she's been very active [on the issue], and we hope to work with her."

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LEADERS OF **TEEN** PREGNANCY PREVENTION

These are the current members of the new, independent, privately funded National Campaign to Prevent **Teen** Pregnancy. President Clinton has asked Dr. Henry W. Foster Jr. to be an unpaid liaison between the White House and the campaign.

- * Thomas Kean, former governor of New Jersey
- * Isabel V. Sawhill, senior fellow, Urban Institute
- * Charlotte L. Beers, chairman and chief executive, Ogilvy and Mather
- * William Galston, school of public affairs, University of Maryland
- * Katharine Graham, chairman of the executive committee, The Washington Post Co.
- * **Whoopi** Goldberg, actress
- * Dr. David Hamburg, president, Carnegie Corp. of New York
- * Irving B. Harris, chairman, the Harris Foundation
- * Barbara Huberman, director of training, Advocates for Youth
- * Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, Kansas Republican
- * Dr. C. Everett Koop, former surgeon general
- * Judy McGrath, president, MTV
- * Jody Miller, senior vice president, Americast
- * Kristin A. Moore, executive director, Child Trends Inc.
- * Hugh Price, president, National Urban League Inc.
- * Warren B. Rudman, former senator
- * Andrew J. Young, former ambassador to the United Nations.

Source: The National Campaign to Prevent **Teen** Pregnancy

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GRAPHIC: Photo, The selection of actress **Whoopi** Goldberg to serve on a panel whose objective is to reduce **teen**-age pregnancy has raised some eyebrows., By AP ; Box, LEADERS OF **TEEN** PREGNANCY PREVENTION, By The Washington Times