

**Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman**

**On abstinence-only funding increase in the Labor-H Approps Bill**

**November 6, 2007**

I am deeply disappointed that this bill increases the amount of money going to abstinence-only programs.

In 2004 I asked my staff to look at the curricula most popular among federally-funded grantees in this abstinence-only program. We found that most contained significant scientific and medical errors. Kids were being taught that HIV can be spread through tears and sweat. They were taught that condoms didn't help prevent STD transmission. And they were taught that pregnancy occurs one in every seven times a couple uses condoms.

But these findings didn't lead to change – instead the Administration and other defenders of this kind of program dug in their heels. They insisted there was no problem, without taking seriously the fact that flawed public health information was being provided to American teens with taxpayer dollars. In 2006, GAO found that HHS still wasn't reviewing the medical accuracy of curricula used in the biggest federal abstinence-only programs.

It would be one thing if these programs actually worked. If they helped kids make healthier decisions, then maybe it would make sense to go in and try to deal with some of the accuracy issues. But abstinence-only programs don't work. In 2007, HHS released the results of an independent study it had requested on the effectiveness of federally-funded abstinence-only programs. This was a randomized, controlled study – the gold standard of research. The researchers found that compared to the control group, abstinence-only

programs had no impact at all on whether participants had sex. They had no impact on the age of first sex. They had no impact on the number of partners. And they had no impact on rates of pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease.

There is no evidence to support these programs, and they should get no federal funding. It is an outrage that instead they are receiving an increase.

Defenders of abstinence-only like to claim that parents support abstinence education. It's true that surveys show parents want programs to promote abstinence as the healthiest choice for young people. We all want that. But the surveys also show that parents overwhelmingly want a full range of age-appropriate information taught, so that youth are best prepared to stay healthy.

Parents care more about the health of their children than about politics or ideology. I think that's probably why they understand that the abstinence-*only* programs we've been funding are a mistake. They contain serious misinformation and, most importantly, are not effective in improving adolescent health. After putting more than a billion federal dollars into these programs, we have seen no results.

I know it's critical that we pass this appropriations bill. But it's wrong to spend scarce dollars on programs that we know don't work. It's wrong to put our children at risk of health problems and unwanted pregnancies because we've withheld essential health information. And it's indefensible to use adolescents as political pawns instead of taking an honest, evidence-based look at their health and well-being.