PS for 9/27/90

Spinning Our Wheels on Teen Pregnancies

So far as is known, no count has ever been made of the hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars that are spent every year for the announced purpose of preventing teen pregnancies. The spending flows through schools and colleges, public health and family service agencies, welfare, and other children's services, and an untold number of private "providers" or "grantees."

It's bad enough that no accounting is ever made of the money so freely spent. It's unconscionable that it continues without any evidence that the expenditures have achieved any goal.

In what may be the first serious attempt to evaluate government programs whose stated goal is to reduce teen pregnancies, the Illinois State Auditor just concluded "there is no direct link between most Parents Too Soon-type services and a reduction in adolescent pregnancy." The audit concluded that it could not be determined "which program strategies and elements were effective, ineffective or even counter-productive."

Parents Too Soon (PTS) is the Illinois agency that dispenses tax dollars to combat teen pregnancies. Never authorized by the Illinois Legislature, it is an Executive Branch initiative started by the Governor in 1983 with a budget of $6.5 million and by 1990 had risen to a budget of $20.7 in line-item appropriations from various state agencies.

The state evaluation of the Parents Too Soon program was made by state Auditor General Robert Cronson under a legislative mandate that ordered him to identify PTS's "goals" and to determine "the extent of their achievement" and "what the expenditures accomplished." The audit failed to unearth any positive achievements toward PTS's stated goals.

One of the main reasons the teen pregnancy program was difficult to evaluate, according to the 330-page audit, is that public health officials have not counted abortions in Illinois since 1980. In that year, pro-abortionists won a court case which overturned a state law requiring abortions to be reported.

Parents Too Soon personnel have relied on a decreased teen birth rate to claim success in their multi-million-dollar expenditures to help 74,000 teens. However,

the state audit pointed out that “a reduction in teen births is not necessarily a reduction in teen pregnancies.”

The state audit detailed heavy funding of Planned Parenthood and school-based clinics, with heavy emphasis on the distribution of “contraceptive devices and drugs.” The audit made several references to “Mental Health Encounters” at the school-based clinics and “in classroom” presentations.

The audit found that “the impact of these services on reducing teen pregnancies was not measured,” either by PTS or by the clinics which received the funds. Instead, PTS relied on prior studies to justify its expenditures, but even these studies were inconclusive, and at least one study found “that simply providing contraceptive services does not reduce teen pregnancy rates.”

Despite a 1980 Illinois court ruling requiring that abstinence be taught as part of any sex education program, the only PTS-funded program that stresses abstinence is **Project Respect** (Box 97, Golf, Illinois 60029), which last year received a puny $77,000 out of the $20.7 million budget. **Project Respect**, run by Project Director Kathleen Sullivan, is also one of the only two out of 320 contracts award to 174 service providers by PTS which had an independent evaluation.

Project Respect’s evaluation shows a positive attitudinal improvement toward abstinence on the pre-to post-tests. Mrs. Sullivan argues that this improvement in teen attitudes about sex “makes the program extremely cost-effective” because, if teens can avoid promiscuity, “they then don’t need expensive social services to deal with the physical, emotional and financial consequences.”

The Illinois auditor found numerous examples of how PTS failed to account for how it spent nearly $100 million of tax funds over the last seven years. The auditor general found that “Parents Too soon lacks adequate guidelines, directions, and restrictions to ensure that it efficiently and effectively accomplishes its purposes.”

The state audit said that “Public Health and Public Aid officials reported incomplete and conflicting budgetary and expenditure data throughout the audit.” PTS’s Fiscal Year 1989 budget and expenditure reports “had to be revised nine times before they reflected actual PTS allocations and expenditures. This was indicative of poor programmatic controls.”

Now that Illinois has demonstrated that most tax-funded program spent for the alleged purpose of stopping teen pregnancies is just going down the drain, perhaps

other states – and even the Federal Government – will consider ordering an audit to find out how their money is being spent.