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Nick Coleman: Families that value kids must speak up for sex education

By Nick Coleman, Star Tribune

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A new Gallup poll shows nearly half the country doesn't believe in evolution (including two-thirds of Republicans), proving that the rapid stupefaction of America continues unabated.

If you don't believe me, I have a new Minnesota sex-education law to show you. Or, rather, not to show you.

In a last-minute piece of strong-arming that went almost unnoticed, Republican Gov. Tim Pawlenty forced DFL leaders of the Legislature to drop a comprehensive and moderate sex-education proposal from the \$14 billion education bill that passed on the last day of the 2007 session. The sex-ed proposal -- backed by educators and the public -- was blocked by the extremist conservative forces that Pawlenty has pandered to in his quest for the national limelight. At their insistence, Pawlenty threatened to veto the entire education bill if the sex-ed provision wasn't dropped. The DFL majority caved, removing the measure and clearing the way for the education bill to pass.

The DFL collapse was a mini-version of the larger Democratic collapses in Washington on the war in Iraq and in the culture wars at home. Just last week, a House subcommittee approved \$141 million -- an increase of \$28 million -- for abstinence-only sex education, despite a congressionally funded report clearly showing abstinence programs do not work.

That 10-year study, released in April, showed kids given abstinence-only education are as likely to have sex -- and with as many partners -- as any other kids. The big difference? Abstinence-only kids are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior, and in sex without contraception.

"Abstinence-only education does not inoculate kids from exploring or from developing into adults," says Brigid Riley, executive director of Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MOAPPP). "But it's an easy thing for politicians to put our kids' health at risk."

MOAPPP (for more information, go to www.moappp.org) has led a broad-based eight-year effort to update the state's K-12 sex-education statute, passed in 1988 and amended in 1999, which was aimed at preventing HIV/AIDS while also emphasizing abstinence. The updated provision, called by the radical name "Responsible Family Life and Sexuality Education," would have permitted high schools to teach contraception methods, relationships and other real-world skills needed by teens, even (or especially) the ones indoctrinated in abstinence-only ideologies that often fail disastrously in the back seats of cars on Saturday nights.

Minnesotans, according to research, overwhelmingly support comprehensive (and

voluntary) sex education at the junior and senior high levels, from abstinence to contraception.

But Vice President Pawlenty (he denies he's seeking higher office but continues to be mentioned as a possible GOP running mate in 2008) has yoked his ambitions to conservative groups such as the Minnesota Family Council.

The homosexually obsessed "Family Council" lobbied against the sex-ed bill, assailing it as "anti-family" and claiming, ridiculously, that it promoted oral and anal sex (ironically, some studies show kids taught abstinence are more likely to believe that non-vaginal sex is "not sex"). The Family Council has claimed credit for the sex-ed defeat, bragging that it mobilized "thousands of social conservatives ... to call the governor (encouraging him) to veto any bill that included comprehensive sex education."

If your kid gets knocked up, send those medical bills to the Minnesota Family Council.

But why should the majority of Minnesotans have their children's welfare sabotaged by a vocal minority and the pandering politicians whose souls they own? This is where mainstream parents come in: We need to make ourselves heard.

"We need parents to raise their voices and talk to their school superintendents, their principals and their legislators and help get comprehensive sex education passed," says Riley of MOAPPP. "Because right now, we are trading kids' knowledge and information -- their health and their futures -- while the politicians cave in to some very narrow values."

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