



As a physician, Jay worked in a public hospital where sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies were common among teens and young adults. As a senator, Jay would bring a medical approach to issues of sexuality and family planning, emphasizing the need for better education and preventive health care.

Policy Perspective: Family Planning and Sexuality

Human sexuality is a powerful force and is basic to human nature. Families and religious institutions are the first line for teaching about responsible sexuality. But unintended consequences of sexual relations, such as sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV infections) and unwanted pregnancies create significant problems that society must address. For example:

- The United States has unacceptably high rates of sexual transmitted diseases¹. Rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis infections continue to rise.
- Despite the seriousness and potentially devastating impact of this disease, new HIV infections continue to increase.²
- The abortion rate in the United States is almost twice that in Western Europe (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands).³

Currently, public debates about family planning and sexuality often focus on how to deal with problems after they have occurred (e.g. treatment for sexually transmitted diseases/HIV, abortions for unwanted pregnancies). Also, the abortion debate in the United States generates significant passion and discussion, but it often misses a larger issue: reducing the abortion rate in the US to Western European levels through prevention would eliminate hundreds of thousands of abortions each year. Individuals with diverse views on abortion would welcome this outcome, but it hasn't been a focus of public debate.

Public policy toward sexual issues requires a fact-based approach. To address sexuality and family planning effectively, the following steps should be taken:

- Commit to reducing sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies through youth education that includes emphasis on personal responsibility and abstinence, as well as information on contraception. The available evidence does not support the efficacy of abstinence-only education.
- Expand Title X programs that provide information on contraception and family planning.
- Keep abortion legal, but work to reduce the abortion rate. It is estimated that about half the pregnancies in the US are unplanned, and approximately forty percent of these unintended pregnancies end in abortions.⁴ The most effective way to decrease abortions is by reducing the rate of unplanned pregnancies through education and improved and affordable access to family planning.
- Provide women with unplanned pregnancies with choices by also offering more support for adoption, and more help for new parents and struggling families.

Individuals must make personal decisions about sexuality and family planning based on their own ethics and beliefs. The public policy goals should be responsible sexuality that leads to low rates of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

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1 <http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats/>, Accessed 11/16/2007

2 <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/At-A-Glance.htm>, Accessed 11/16/2007

3 Sedgh, Lancet, 370: 1338-45, 2007

4 www.gutmacher.org, accessed 12/31/07