

Should birth control be taught in schools?

By MARGARET MILLER

Is information about birth control a necessary part of a teen-ager's knowledge, or is it a blueprint for promiscuity?

When you teach him about contraceptives, does it foster knowledgeable decision making or does it represent irresponsible permissiveness?

Is such teaching solely and forever the responsibility of parents, or should the schools play a role?

The questions, not new, foster strong feelings on both sides, a fact made clear once again as a public hearing on Michigan House Bill 425 came to the Schoolcraft College campus Monday.

The bill amends Michigan's public school code of 1976 to permit discussion in sex education classes of "the matters of sex hygiene, birth control and symptoms of sex disease."

State Rep. Barbara Rose Collins (D-Detroit) introduced the bill and con-

ducted the hearing, called at the request of Rep. Robert Law (R-Westland).

She stated that Michigan and Louisiana are the only states in the country in which sex education is permitted in public schools but birth control information is prohibited.

SPEAKERS at the hearing, carefully alternated by the law-maker, took both sides of the question with vigor.

Two Livonia ministers, the Rev. Roland DeRenzo and the Rev. Charles Webster of St. Paul United Presbyterian, voiced opposing views.

"I oppose the bill on behalf of our congregation because it is in violation of Article IV in the Bill of Rights," Rev. DeRenzo stated. "That section guarantees people the right to be secure in their persons, and this bill violates the rights of parents and minor children in personal security."

The pastor insisted that "the three Ps—pill, promiscuity and permissiveness—are the cause of our

problems, and sex education involving teaching birth control is treating the symptoms."

"I don't see how we can solve major social problems unless we deal with the causes," he added.

Asked by Rep. Collins what type of legislation he would recommend "to deal with the three Ps," he answered: "We need to think through all the implications and get back to the Bible and the idea of God."

REV. WEBSTER, stating he was taking the stand as "father, husband and clergyman," pointed out that "the concern of all of us is to prevent unwanted pregnancy and venereal disease."

He said he too felt birth control information is best dispensed within the family, but pointed out a couple of major problems.

"The role of the family is changing—that's real in our society," he said.

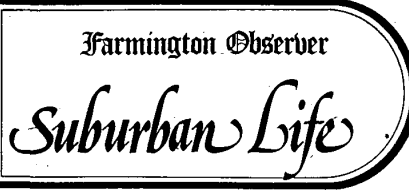
And he added that "there's a whole

area of misinterpretation between the generations on this matter." "Parents feel they have told their children what they need to know, but then I talk to the same kids in seminars and workshops and find there is great ignorance. The discrepancy is unbelievable."

PATRICIA BURNETT, chairman of the Michigan Women's Commission, gave figures showing that the number of pregnancies among unmarried teens nearly tripled from 1960 to 1970.

"Contraceptive methods are not being used by sexually-active teens; they don't understand the relationship between sex and reproduction," she stated.

"Since classes now are not able to address the subject of birth control, they just skirt the subject and don't do any good at all."



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(F1B)

'The three Ps: Pill, Promiscuity, Permissiveness, may be the real cause of our problems. Sex education is treating symptoms.'

—The Rev. Roland DeRenzo

'I don't believe in keeping knowledge from children. Experimentation does go on outside wedlock, that's real. But for some reason it's wrong to say there are ways to not get pregnant.'

—Franklin counselor Jack Ort

She also mentioned the health hazards inherent in pregnancy among young girls and the school dropout rate.

Robert Gurvin of Plymouth, representing Michigan Citizens for Life, insisted that "there is also risk to health in pills."

He added that main objection, though, is that "teaching birth control in the schools is going to be impersonal, and yet the decision that the student must make from that information is one of the most personal there can be."

"The family has a right to be safeguarded against unreasonable interference," he stated.

WOMEN SPEAKING in favor of the bill included Kathleen Fojtik, a member of the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners who said she was speaking "as a teacher who feels children have a right to knowledge, including knowledge about how to use their bodies," and Eleanor O'Brien of Planned Parenthood, who described herself as "a mother and grandmother, a parent who understands her limitations."

"We'd all like to be perfect parents," Mrs. O'Brien said, "and I'd be the first to agree with the pastor that the bill is treating symptoms. But the state is treating symptoms all the time in the many ways it takes care of the kids produced by unwanted pregnancies."

Livonia residents Verda Bonello, a member of Happiness of Womanhood, Inc., and Margaret Spas, of Michigan Citizens for Life, took stands against the bill.

"We are depriving children of the chance to use their skills to meet the problems of over-population," stated Mrs. Bonello.

"We can see some of the results of declining birth rate: closing of schools and increases in Social Security payments."

Mrs. Spas said she objected strongly to some of the material Planned Parenthood has used in sex education and stated counsel for a legislative committee in Arizona had called one such publication "pornographic."

Patricia Nixon, a Birmingham resident, said she felt the bill involves "degradation of women and children."

She explained she had found evidence that among some members of the medical profession "there is a growing tendency to regard pregnancy itself as a venereal disease," and asked:

"Do you think this attitude keeps respect for women? Will we be teaching this to our children?"

"SEXUAL EXPERIMENTATION does take place," stated John Ort, counselor at Franklin High School, "and we have to understand that's real."

"But for some reason we're forbidden to tell young people that there are ways to not get pregnant."

"I don't believe in keeping knowledge from children, and I have seen teens in great ignorance of sex, basically because they are unable to communicate with their parents."

"Now, that's the crux of the problem."

From Sandra Bennett of Detroit, leader in Planned Parenthood, came a statement that "the irony is that teens can get information—they do a pretty good job of finding out what they want to know."

"We need to get information off the bathroom walls and into the classroom," she concluded.

REP. COLLINS stopped testimony only once, when HOW member Connie Tarran of Rochester stated that the bill would allow discussion of "sexually deviant behavior."

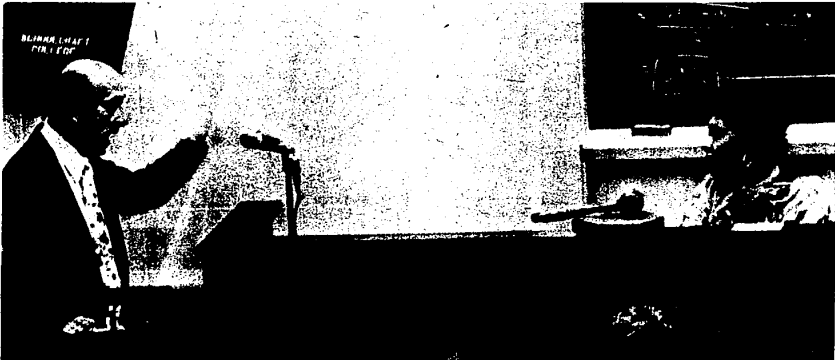
"That's already in the law," Ms. Collins said. "The only thing that has been added to that section is that birth control may be discussed."

Mrs. Tarran ended her testimony. She stated later that the legislator was correct in her action, but added:

"If this is in the books, our children have no protection whatsoever."

Rep. Collins summarized at the end of the hearing, stating that the bill as put forth is "a working paper" and will be worked on further after reports from medical and educational task forces.

One part that will be scrutinized carefully, she explained, will be concerns of parents regarding the clause that permits them to request that their children not attend classes involving dispensing of birth control information and have no stigma attached to this move.



The Rev. Roland DeRenzo makes a point against teaching birth control methods in schools as he gives his views before Michigan Rep. Barbara Rose Collins (D-Detroit) at a Schoolcraft College hearing on House Bill 425. (Staff photo by Bob Woodring)



DEBORA WEILAND

PTA honors 3 students with \$300 scholarships

Three scholarships, each worth \$300, were given to high school seniors at the annual meeting of the Farmington Area PTA Councils, held this year at Eagle Elementary School.

The recipients were Debora Weiland, Douglas Smith and Robert Smith.

The scholarships are made possible through support of Farmington area elementary school PTAs by direct contributions to the scholarship fund, and by participation in an annual fund raising project.

This year's fund raiser was "A & P Donation Day."

"That was a big success," said Sylvia Clingan, speaking for the council. "We want to thank every one who participated."

Scholarship winner Debora Weiland is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Weiland and a senior at North Farmington High School. She has been active on her school newspaper and won a Detroit News Scholastic writing award.

She is involved in Junior Achievement, volleyball and backpacking through the YMCA. Her plans for the future include attending Oakland Community College with transfer courses for Wayne State University in 1979.

DOUGLAS SMITH is the son of Mr. and Mrs. William Smith and a student at Farmington High. He has served as junior class president, and president of the school's ski club.

He is a member of student council and the National Honor Society. On Student Government Day he was voted to the office of district judge.

He serves as an usher at his church and is a member of the Oakway Symphony and the Farmington Community Band. He plans to attend Mich-

igan Technological University and study chemical engineering.

Robert Smith is the son of Tr. and Mrs. Robert J. Smith and a student at Harrison. His activities there have included the marching band, symphony band, and serving as an officer of the community committee.

He has been a news, feature and editorial writer for the school newspaper and is a member of the school's literary magazine staff.

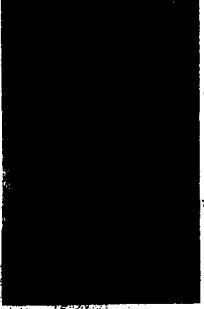
He is a choir member, a thespian who took a part in the school's production of "Oklahoma," and served as an

announcer for the school's radio club.

He plans to attend University of Michigan and study journalism.

THREE MEMBERS of the PTA Council, and a counselor from each of the three high schools, make up the scholarship committee.

Recipients are selected on the basis of their general scholastic aptitude for college work, as judged by their high school grade levels, references of high school counselors and aptitude test scores. Their extra-curricular activities are also considered in the judging.



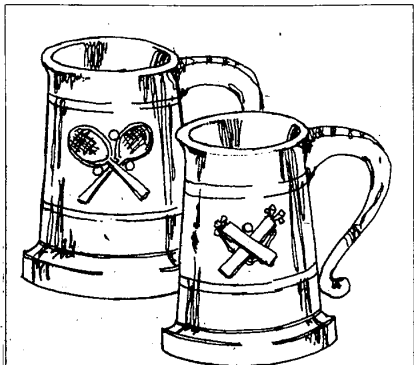
DOUGLAS SMITH

Scouts ready for camping

Boy Scout Troop 179 is preparing for a week of camping in Lost Lake State Reservation, near Clare, July 1-14. The troop is sponsored by Church of Christ, located at Eleven Mile and Drake.

The boys will camp out, have access to swimming, boating, archery, rifle shooting, handcraft and field sports, and a campfire.

For more information, call the scout leader, Ken MILLER, at 474-0900.



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