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Beasley urges teen abstinence

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WASHINGTON - Gov. David Beasley, invoking images of his parents' divorce and a rock star who killed himself over a bad marriage, made an impassioned plea Saturday for young people to wait for marriage before having sex.

"Marriage is the one place where sex is really safe, where love is truly lasting, where the sexual union is perfectly celebrated," Beasley Beasleytold the National Leadership Summit on Abstinence.

The summit, sponsored by the Texas-based Medical Institute for Sexual Health, was convened to promote abstinence as "the most effective means of reducing sexual disease and teen-age pregnancy."

Institute founder Dr. Joe S. Mcilhaney Jr. defined abstinence as "the avoidance of sexual intercourse until marriage."

Beasley began his keynote speech with a reference to "rock icon" Kurt Cobain, who told wife Courtney Love he'd "rather die than divorce" shortly before committing suicide.

"That's a statement that shocked me," Beasley said. "Here was the symbolic leader of a counterculture being driven to desperation by a broken marriage."

Later, Beasley said he was deeply affected when his parents' marriage ended in divorce.

"If there was ever one event in my life I wish had never happened ... I would still want my mom and dad to be married," he said.

"I know from experience that when we wink at the decline of marriage, we are writing a prescription for disaster," Beasley added. "I know it, and so did Kurt Cobain."

Among those listening in an audience of about 300 was abstinence advocate Ann Badgley, the founder and executive director of the Lowcountry Crisis Pregnancy Center Inc. and Heritage Community Services Inc.

Badgley said Beasley was an excellent choice for keynote speaker because he understands the pressures placed on young people.

"Governor Beasley has become a Christian in his adult life and wasn't necessarily following the way of the Lord when he was younger," Badgley said.

"I believe at that time he began to understand more about how the nature of man can be set at a higher standard," she said.

Asked about the social climate when he was growing up, Beasley said, "I think we all learn from experience."

Badgley said the pregnancy center she runs receives 100 telephone calls per day and serves 300 women each month.

Few women report that they become sexually active because they enjoy sex, she said.

"It is almost never the stuff magazines and movies are made of," Badgley said.

Rather, most cite reasons such as loneliness, intimidation or low self-esteem, said Badgley, who at 49 is also the mother of a 23-year-old son and 19-year-old daughter.

"I can say with reasonable certainty that my kids are practicing abstinence," she said.

To Badgley, abstinence is a matter of self-control.

"I believe you can control yourself at any age if you're taught to do that," she said.

Badgley's clients at Heritage Community Services, which offers "education and social services from a conservative point of view," include sailors between the ages of 19 and 25.

The pregnancy center "stands in the gap when young women think they might be pregnant and are too afraid to tell anyone," she said.

"We are exhausted," Badgley added. "Our workers literally run from room to room. There are a lot of girls who need help."

Her findings would not surprise leaders of the weekend summit, who noted that roughly 360,000 unmarried American teens deliver babies each year.

Other facts cited by the abstinence proponents included:

77 percent of unwed teen mothers in the United States go on welfare within five years of giving birth.

An estimated 10 million U.S. teens are sexually active. Almost one in three contract a sexually transmitted disease each year.

More teens have chlamydia - a disease that can cause infertility - than any other age group.

The group's blunt answer to such statistics came with a public relations kit delivered to the media.

The cover of the kit featured an unopened condom surrounded by these words:
"Gathering in Washington this week: 300 leading professionals who know that this (the condom) is no substitute for good judgment."

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