WASHINGTON -- Democrats long skeptical that abstinence-only programs are more effective than "comprehensive" sex-ed classes are trying to reverse Bush administration policy and kill a key entitlement program for abstinence-only funding set to expire Jun. 30.

Democrats leading the House Energy and Commerce Committee say they won't take action to reauthorize the provision because recent studies -- including one released last month that concludes that students in abstinence-only and sex-ed classes are equally active sexually -- prove abstinence-only just doesn't work.

"Abstinence-only programs simply do not reflect reality," said Rep. Diana DeGette, D-Colo., who blames an ideology-driven agenda by the Bush administration for pumping dollars into failed abstinence-only programs.

"The facts should drive the president's policy, not his stubborn ideology," DeGette added.

But Republicans on the committee, say they are working with a handful of Democrats to make sure Section 510 of Title V of the Social Security Act is reauthorized by week's end. Sources say a similar debate is going on in the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction in that chamber over Title V.

"I don't understand the dynamic, but the hard, pro-abortion groups have really come out in the last few years and attacked abstinence education. They've picked on things and really blown them out of proportion," said Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb.,

told FOXNews.com.

The decade-long debate over the efficacy of abstinence-only began in 1996, when the funding was awarded as part of the welfare reform bill. First awarded in 1997, the State Abstinence Education Program provides abstinence-only education to groups of student considered at high-risk of out-of-wedlock births.

Funding through Title V, which provides $50 million in federal matching funds to states that apply for it, is used to teach students that sexual activity outside of marriage is not only dangerous and could result in unwanted pregnancies, but also that abstinence and monogamy are healthier approaches to relationships.

Abstinence education supporters contend that their programs have resulted in lower teen extramarital sex, fewer out-of-wedlock births and happy teens overall. They charge that so-called "comprehensive" sex-ed programs are just how-to courses designed to make teens feel good about being sexually active and more curious by emphasizing condoms and not abstinence.

"Ultimately, it's a values thing -- what message do you want to impart to the young people of our country? That it's only pleasure?" said Christine Kim, an abstinence policy expert with the Washington, D.C.-based Heritage Foundation. She said that available studies show that high school students who abstain from sex are more likely to do better academically, are less inclined to be depressed or suicidal, are more likely to graduate college and less likely to have sexually-transmitted diseases.

But opponents say that on its own, abstinence-only programs are no longer welcome. They add that abstinence can be taught as part of a comprehensive curriculum that also includes information about contraception -- better known as "safe-sex" education.

"There has been no evidence of any effect (of these programs) ... and without evidence, people are asking, what is going on here?" said one House Energy and Commerce aide who did not want to be identified.

No Studies for People Who Want to Prove Something

According to the national statistics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, teen pregnancy is down dramatically from the early 1990s. More sexually-active students are using condoms and fewer high school students overall are engaging in sex -- 47 percent in 2005, down from 54 percent in 1991.

However, none of the studies completely substantiate either side of the abstinence debate.

The May study used by Democrats on the committee and others had been conducted for the Department of Health and Human Services and followed a group of high school students over the course of four years.

The results from Mathematica Policy Research Inc., which conducted the study, found that students who went through abstinence-only programs were no less likely to be sexually active in the four to six years after participating in the study, and in fact, had similar numbers of sexual partners and had initiated sex at the same age.

At the same time, according to the study, students participating in the safe-sex classes, which typically weigh heavily on teaching condom use, were as likely to engage in unprotected sex as students in abstinence-only courses.

"The study finds that the sexual abstinence of students in four (abstinence)

programs selected for the study was much the same as that of students who did not participate in these programs," said Christopher Trenholm, project director for Mathematica.

While neither side can point to the study to demonstrate which program is better or worse, supporters of abstinence-only programs refer to a 2005 study in the Dist rict of Columbia
that found that middle school girls participating in the Best Friends abstinence-only program were less likely to engage in high-risk sexual behavior than their peers who did not participate in the program.

A recent poll of parents by Zobgy International found that 59 percent want more money to go to abstinence education, while 22 percent want more funding for comprehensive sex education.

Backers of those safe-sex programs say teens need a realistic prevention program and abstinence-only leaves them uniformed about the consequences of unprotected sex.Supporters of the comprehensive approach say abstinence is taught alongside other lessons about contraception, sexually-transmitted diseases and sexuality overall.

A May review conducted by the Administration for Children and Families and the Health and Human Services Department found that the majority of nine such programs include much less discussion on abstinence and committed, monogamous relationships than they on instructions about how to purchase and use contraceptives.

Terry said if abstinence-only programs are at least as effective as comprehensive sex-ed in keeping kids out of the back seat, then the debate really comes down to dollars.

A 2004 Heritage Foundation study shows that government funding for sex-ed to abstinence-only programs is $12 to $1. In 2002, the government spent $1.7 billion on contraception-related funding, compared to $144 million in total abstinence funding. According to the analysis, $653 million of the funding for contraceptive-related sex-ed went to teen education programs.

Sex-ed supporters "want to eliminate the one (dollar)," Terry said. "None of us are standing up and saying 'eliminate the 12 (dollars)' -- we're just saying there are other options out there."

Despite the House Energy and Commerce Committee's commitment to kill Title V, the Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee passed a spending bill in June that includes an increase for the non-related HHS' Community-Based Abstinence Education Program
to $144 million, compared to a $109 million allocation in fiscal year 2007.

Reports indicate the increase was approved to get Republicans on board with the fiscal year 2008 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies spending package and it was not clear whether the monies would make it through the full committee mark-up, expected after the July 4 recess.