

In some countries, they are being elected to office, named to cabinet-level posts and appointed to leading positions in powerful civil society organizations—these are the thought-leaders and the pioneers. But there is another, parallel movement that has also begun: the quiet leadership of ordinary women who are doing extraordinary things.

On January 30, scores of Iraqi women poured into polling stations in cities and rural communities. Braving bullets, bombs, and substantial personal threat, they joined their fellow countrymen to vote in the nation's first free election, an act that warrants our deepest respect.

When I reflect on their courage, I realize that in the United States we have no point of reference to understand what they must have felt on that Monday in January. Though the women in our Nation have fought and continue to fight for justice and equal opportunity, the trip from our homes to the voting booth has never involved a life or death decision. The fact that 8 million people, 60 percent of whom were women according to some estimates, chose to risk their lives to vote is, quite frankly, astounding to me.

These women have grasped at democracy and they now clench it with tightened fists. I think we can learn something from this. I would like to call attention to their sacrifices and to highlight the lessons that their courage can teach women in the United States and around the world.

It is easy to take for granted today, but women in America also had to fight for the right to vote. After a decades' long struggle, women finally secured the right to vote in 1920 and since that time women have made incredible advancements.

Women have risen to the top of Fortune 500 companies and fill the domes of capitols and the halls of universities—today approximately 56 percent of college students are female, compared to 44 percent in 1973. The wage gap, however, is still alarming. Women who work full-time earned about 79.5 cents on the dollar compared to their male counterparts in 2003.

Women are a true political force and continue to contribute every day all across this country. In the years that I have been in politics, women have changed the face of American politics.

Issues that were once relegated to the back burner—education, health care, children, and seniors—are now at the top of America's political agenda.

Since I was first elected to the Senate in 1992, we have made remarkable progress for women by:

Increasing breast cancer research funding by 800 percent;

Tripling funding for domestic abuse shelters;

Raising lending to women through the Small Business Administration;

Passing the Family and Medical Leave Act and the Violence against Women Act;

Covering mammogram screening for Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries;

Extending maternity hospitalization to 48 hours; and

Requiring health care companies to fund breast reconstruction after mastectomies.

We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go.

That is why I am cosponsoring the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. This amendment is essential to guarantee that the rights and freedoms granted by our Founding Fathers apply equally to men and women.

In addition, women's reproductive rights are under attack in Congress like never before, and I remain deeply committed to protecting a woman's right to choose guaranteed by *Roe v. Wade*. I also believe that it is extremely important that we reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and abortions.

I have spoken on this issue before and it is something that I feel very strongly about. Recently, we have seen considerable setbacks in the battle for reproductive rights and I fear that the advances we have fought so hard for are now threatened.

I am part of a generation of women who remember a time when a woman did not have the right to decide when and if she would give birth. I will not stand by and let us return to that time.

The decline of our rights under this administration has been slow but steady. Subtle encroachments occur either through the high-profile path of judicial appointments or through the silent passageways of regulations, obscure amendments tacked on to large bills, or grant limitations.

The current administration has systematically chipped away at the rights of women, and they have done so shielded from public scrutiny by employing these quiet forms of repression and intimidation. I am here to say: we have noticed, we are paying attention and we will fight.

These are issues that affect every woman in the United States. Let us not become complacent. Let us take inspiration from the women in Iraq who risked their lives to exercise their rights as we continue the struggle to defend our own. The time for basking in the glory of past achievements has passed; this is a battle that must be fought by the everyday women warriors. It is time to roll up our sleeves and get back to work.

Because of the women who have come before us, we are fortunate to participate in our democratic system of justice. We cannot take that opportunity and responsibility for granted.

THE PRENATALLY DIAGNOSED CONDITIONS AWARENESS ACT

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I recently introduced S. 609, the Prenatally-diagnosed Conditions Awareness Act, with my colleague, the senior Senator from Massachusetts. This bill will accomplish the following:

One, ensure that pregnant women facing a positive prenatal test result

will be more likely to receive up-to-date, scientific information about the life expectancy, clinical course, intellectual and functional development, and prenatal and postnatal treatment options for their child;

Two, provide pregnant women referrals to support services such as hotlines, Web sites, information clearinghouses, registries of families willing to adopt babies with disabilities, and parent-to-parent programs where people with children with disabilities meet with the newly diagnosed family to provide support and real-world information;

Three, improve epidemiologic understanding of prenatally-diagnosed conditions, within a strict set of confidentiality protections;

Four, support health care providers who perform prenatal tests and deliver results; and

Five, authorize a study of the effectiveness of existing health care and family support services for children with disabilities and their families.

The need for this legislation and the public dialogue I hope it encourages could not be more urgent. Medical science has provided the opportunity to obtain a massive amount of information about our own bodies and health and that of our children. But I am concerned that our ethical dialogue has not kept pace with new ethical challenges. We have been able to screen for certain conditions in the womb for quite some time now, but I am concerned that we don't have a great track record for handling that information very well. For some conditions that can be detected in the womb, such as Down Syndrome, we are aborting 80 percent or more of the babies who test positive. The effect of this sort of "weeding out" represents a sort of new eugenics, a form of systematic, disability-based discrimination.

Worse, trends suggest that this atrocity doesn't just end in the womb. The Netherlands has recently enacted policies that make it acceptable for doctors to end the lives of terminally ill children up to age 12, resulting in about 100 cases of pediatrician-induced homicides of children with severe handicaps each year. Belgium is considering similar policies. Unfortunately, these policies are starting to trickle into our own country. In Texas, a court recently upheld a hospital's decision to remove life support from a 6-month-old handicapped baby, against his mother's wishes.

It sounds too crazy to be true, but it is not just fringe thinking—leading so-called ethics experts have supported the killing of children with disabilities, such as Princeton Professor Peter Singer, who wrote in 1993 in his book *Practical Ethics*, "killing a defective infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person . . . sometimes it is not wrong at all." These ideas echo back to Nazi Germany, and, unfortunately, there is a tragic history, even in our own country, of abuse of institutionalized people with disabilities, only

a few decades ago. Once one goes down the path of valuing some lives more than others, of saying that people with disabilities don't have the same dignity and right to live as others, there are very few means that don't justify the so-called "worthy end" of a disability-free society.

When I see beautiful children with Down Syndrome, spina bifida and other differences, I can't imagine why our society would ever condone this sort of unnatural selection. We don't want a world where parents feel driven to justify their children's existence. In addition to the many abilities that people with disabilities have which are equivalent to others, these individuals so often have a perspective the rest of us don't have. We learn compassion, heroism, humility, courage and self-sacrifice from these special individuals, and their gift to us is to inspire us, by their example, to achieve these virtues ourselves.

Published surveys suggest that our legislation is desperately needed. A survey of 499 primary care physicians delivering a prenatal diagnosis of Down Syndrome to expectant parents found that 10 percent actively "urged" parents to terminate the pregnancies, and 13 percent indicated that they "emphasized the negative aspects of Down Syndrome so that parents would favor a termination."

This bill offers support to ensure that prenatal testing need not be a negative experience for those whose children are diagnosed with a condition like Down Syndrome. For instance, some pregnant women might choose to carry their child to term if they knew there were waiting lists of families willing to adopt children with Down Syndrome. Some parents might be reassured about keeping their children if they were able to spend some time talking with a family that has a special needs child about their real-life experience. Some parents would be helped by hearing a positive message about the potential and joy of living with children with disabilities, while also being presented with a realistic assessment of the challenges.

There are many people to thank for helping prepare this bill for introduction, and I hope they will continue to help us as we move this bill towards the President's desk. In particular, I am honored to have my friend the senior Senator from Massachusetts as a lead Democrat on this bill. Senator KENNEDY is an incredible champion for people with disabilities. As we have worked together, he has educated me about some of the challenges faced by families with children with disabilities. In particular, I want to thank Connie Garner on Senator KENNEDY's staff, whose tireless advocacy for the dignity and rights of people with disabilities has been an inspiration to me and my staff.

Many thanks to our partners in the House of Representatives, who I hope will speedily pass the companion version of this bill, especially lead

sponsor Chairman SENSENBRENNER. Key House support has also come from my friend Congressman PETE SESSIONS and Congressman JOHN HOSTETTLER.

I urge my colleagues to co-sponsor this legislation and I look forward to working with my colleague from Wyoming, the Chairman of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, and the majority leader, to speed Senate passage of this important legislation.

FRATERNAL BENEFIT SOCIETIES

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, on January 27, the staff of the Joint Committee on Taxation released a report requested by Senate Finance Chairman GRASSLEY and the ranking member, Senator MAX BAUCUS, entitled "Options To Improve Tax Compliance and Reform Tax Expenditures." While I fully expect that many of the recommendations will be the subject of extended debate in the Senate over the coming year, I want to highlight one recommendation that should be rejected immediately: the joint committee staff's proposal to revoke the tax-exempt status of fraternal benefit societies.

Beginning with the Tariff Act of 1894, every Federal tax law has contained a specific exemption for fraternal benefit societies, and with good reason. These organizations, some of which have existed since the Civil War, are a major force for good in America today. Last year, for example, these organizations incurred almost \$360 million in direct fraternal and charitable expenditures, while their individual members devoted more than 80 million volunteer hours—valued at \$1.4 billion—in community and social services. Fraternal benefit societies support their communities in every possible way, including helping families with critically ill children, supporting homeless shelters and homes for the aged, raising funds and supporting local food banks, repairing playgrounds and other community facilities, and helping underprivileged youth stay away from drugs. Fraternal benefit societies are among our Nation's most important first responders; they acted quickly to provide almost \$17 million in financial relief to families affected by 9/11, and have raised upwards of \$8 million in tsunami relief and counting.

What makes this extraordinary effort possible is the requirement under the Internal Revenue Code that fraternal societies also make available to their members insurance against death, disease, and disability, a tradition of mutual aid that goes back to the earliest days of fraternalism. I am troubled, Mr. President, by the fact that the Joint Committee staff has dredged up an old idea that has been rejected once before. In 1984, the Treasury Department made a similar recommendation that resulted in Congress mandating an extensive study of fraternal benefit societies that was issued in 1993. In that

study, Treasury concluded that fraternal societies do not use their tax exemption to compete unfairly against commercial insurers, but instead, use the revenues from insurance to support their fraternal and charitable activities. Treasury left the decision up to Congress, but noted that if the exemption was taken away, these fraternal and charitable activities would be extinguished.

If anything, the rationale for encouraging fraternal benefit societies is greater today than it has been at any other time in our history. Fraternal societies have shown us that the private sector can and will step in to make a difference. As our need for fraternal societies has grown, so too has their devotion to our communities. Fraternal and charitable expenditures were approximately \$242 million in 1985, and the number of volunteer hours on behalf of society members was just over 26 million. Last year fraternal and charitable expenditures were almost \$365 million and the number of volunteer hours had grown to 83 million. At the same time, the share of the insurance market represented by fraternal during this time period has remained steady at around 1.5 percent. In other words, the good that these organizations do has gone way up; they are no more a threat to commercial businesses today than they were 20 years ago. Moreover, I can tell you from personal experience that the 10 million Americans who join fraternal societies are more devoted today to the cause that brought them together—whether religious, patriotic, or a shared heritage—than ever before. Pennsylvania is fortunate to be home to many of these organizations and dedicated citizens.

The Joint Committee staff has concluded that revoking the tax-exemption of fraternal benefit societies would raise \$500 million over 10 years. This pales by comparison to the \$4 billion that fraternal societies are likely to put back into their communities over the same time frame in direct fraternal and charitable expenditures, and the annual \$1.4 billion that their members devote in volunteer time throughout the country.

Recognizing the importance of fostering this type of private sector support for our communities, it is interesting to note that the platform of the Republican National Committee in 2004, 2000, and 1996 contained the following statement: "Because of the vital role of religious and fraternal benevolent societies in fostering charity and patriotism, they should not be subject to taxation."

Mr. President, it often has been said that the power to tax is the power to destroy. This is the time to encourage, not destroy, organizations that devote themselves to social good, organizations from which this Nation has benefited immeasurably for more than 150 years. As Congress concluded in 1985, let us again make sure that this joint committee recommendation is taken off the table.