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## **DON'T PRESSURE PARENTS TO ABORT DISABLED BABIES**

By: Sam Brownback

The following is an adapted excerpt from Kansas Sen. Sam Brownback's new book, "From Power to Purpose: A Remarkable Journey of Faith and Compassion" (Thomas Nelson):

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recently put out new guidelines recommending that all pregnant women be offered screening to determine whether their child may have Down syndrome. The college argues that it is more responsible to inform parents of their options beforehand so that they can decide whether or not to let the baby live.

This recommendation codifies a practice that has become all too common: direct or indirect pressure applied to parents by the medical establishment to end the lives of unborn children with disabilities, because these children are supposedly too much of a burden for their parents to bear.

About 80 percent of Down syndrome children are aborted today. But if these children are born, the Americans With Disabilities Act protects them and assures them of a certain level of accommodation by society. It's one of the most highly touted pieces of legislation of the past 30 years. If you've got a disability, we want to help you.

The irony is that some people are working to make sure that babies with disabilities are never born. That's such a shame.

Many Down syndrome children are the centerpieces of their families. They have amazing gifts and are full of affection. But apparently society thinks nothing about their death in the womb. I raised this question with my colleagues. I've also raised it during hearings on Supreme Court justices. But there's still no support in favor of the life of a disabled child.

In legal circles they talk about the "effects test." What's the effect of the law? That's how people will judge the validity of a law.

The effect of our abortion policy at this moment is that we are in the midst of a genocide of children with Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and other in utero genetic conditions that medical analysis can detect. If we think there's a chance the child may have a disability, too often he or she is killed in the womb, and the system seems to push it.

The current system of analysis is a fallible process. Many times parents have been advised by their physician to abort their unborn child because the infant appeared to have a medical anomaly. I've had people tell me, "Our child tested positive for Down syndrome, but we went ahead with the pregnancy anyway, and it turned out he didn't have Down's at all." I think most people would be shocked to know this happens.

This week I plan to introduce a bill to ensure that no parent would go through this process alone. The "Pre-natally and Post-natally Diagnosed Condition Awareness Act" provides that any family given a

diagnosis of Down syndrome or any other condition would be connected with the necessary support structure. The bill ensures that each family would get sound and balanced information, connection to support services and information about the possibility of adoption so families would not be misled and children could be saved.

Wherever one stands on the abortion issue, the knowledge that 80 to 90 percent of those prenatally diagnosed with Down syndrome are aborted is deeply troubling. I am hopeful that we can embrace a culture that is pro-life and whole-life, a culture worthy of our good and compassionate society.

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