

Life decisions

How far should pro-life advocates go in working with “abortion grays” to reduce the number of abortions? **by JAMIE DEAN** in Washington, D.C.

ONE FAVORITE CAPITOL Hill worker of Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) is an elevator operator named Jimmy. The young man with Down syndrome wears ties given to him by Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and often greets legislators with high-fives or hugs.

“He’s a wonderful young man,” Brownback recently told a pro-life audience in Washington, D.C. “And if you see a Down syndrome child or person in this country today, I hope you give them a hug, because 90 percent are killed in the womb.”

Brownback referred to studies that estimate 80 to 90 percent of parents who learn their unborn children have Down syndrome choose abortion. The senator made a plea to those with unborn babies testing positive for the genetic disorder: “If it’s too tough for the family, don’t kill them. We’ll put them up, and we’ll get them adopted.”

Brownback is putting teeth to that promise with a bill that would establish a national registry of families willing to adopt a child with Down syndrome. The legislation would also provide more education about Down syndrome for expectant parents. (A study by Harvard Medical School found that doctors do not provide parents with enough accurate information about the positive potential of children with Down syndrome.)

The staunchly pro-life Brownback has a surprising ally in the legislation aimed at reducing the number of abortions: the staunchly pro-abortion Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.).

The unlikely pair are co-sponsors of the Prenatally Diagnosed Conditions Act, a bill they first introduced in 2005, but that remains in a Senate committee. Kennedy spokesman Laura Capps said the senator believes abortion should be rare: “If this legislation helps

thorny questions arise: How closely can opposite sides collaborate on combating abortion, and what are the limits to bipartisan compromise on moral absolutes?

Rachel Laser thinks about those questions often. Laser is the director of the culture program at Third Way, a progressive, left-leaning think tank in Washington, D.C., that aims at finding common ground among pro-life proponents and supporters of legalized abortion who want to reduce the number of abortions.

In Laser’s downtown office, an open box of gray wristbands sits next to her desk. “Those symbolize the abortion grays,” Laser told *WORLD*. Third Way coined the term “abortion grays” to refer to those who believe abortion is undesirable but should remain legal.

Laser counts herself among that group: “In my value system it is full-on



“WE’LL GET THEM ADOPTED”: David Egan (right), a spokesman for various Down syndrome organizations, speaks on the Prenatally Diagnosed Conditions Act, sponsored by Brownback (left), at an event in Washington on July 18.

women make better decisions, he’s all for that.”

The Brownback-Kennedy bill is one example of a recent trend in bipartisan approaches to reducing abortions. But as divergent camps look for ways to work together on a difficult issue,

consistent to be for the legality of abortion rights, but also to want to work hard toward the reduction of abortion in America.” Ticking off her “pro-choice bona fides,” Laser explains that she was once general counsel for Planned Parenthood of Washington

Metro. She still advocates keeping abortion legal, but also admits she finds a “moral complexity” to abortion. “Abortion very much involves a woman, but it also involves a developing life,” she said. “I think 1.3 million abortions in America each year is too many.”

That belief has Laser reaching out to legislators and evangelicals to promote policies aimed at reducing the number of abortions in America. Third Way noted success this summer when the group lobbied for passage of the Reducing the Need for Abortions Initiative, a Democrat-sponsored package in the House of Representatives. An appropriations committee incorporated large portions of the legislation into a massive spending bill that the House passed in July.

The \$647 million abortion-related package included funding for abstinence education, an adoption-awareness program, and support for low-income women who become pregnant.

The bill also included funding for sex education and contraception for teens. The appropriations committee did not include the bill’s original provision for awarding grants to health clinics to purchase ultrasound machines.

The initiative didn’t gain broad bipartisan support in the House, but it did find support in two evangelicals who joined Third Way in calling for the bill’s passage: Randy Brinson, founder of Redeem the Vote, and Joel Hunter, senior pastor of the 12,000-member Northland Church in central Florida.

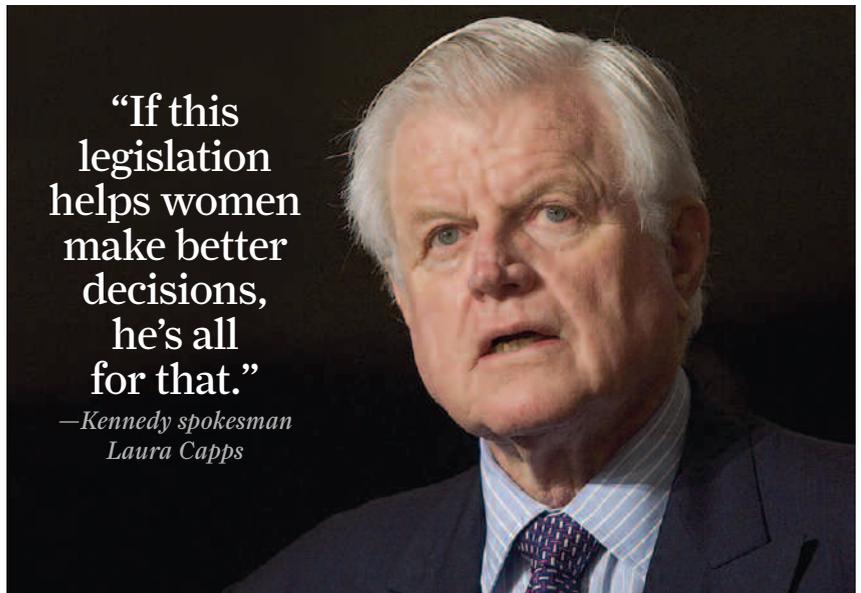
Hunter told WORLD he was enthusiastic about the legislation because it gives assistance to needy women facing pregnancies they might not be able to afford. He hopes such assistance will prevent some women from seeking abortions.

Hunter added that though Third Way supports legalized abortion, he is willing to work with the group because they also promote reducing abortions: “We can save babies here—that’s the bottom line,” he said. “The question isn’t what’s your ideology? It’s are you saving babies?”

For Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.), it isn’t that simple. The pro-life congressman also wants to reduce the number of abortions but said he

“If this legislation helps women make better decisions, he’s all for that.”

—Kennedy spokesman
Laura Capps



couldn’t support the legislation for one major reason: It sends money to Planned Parenthood, the largest provider of abortions in the country. He offered an amendment that would prohibit federal funds from going to Planned Parenthood.

Planned Parenthood receives more than \$300 million in federal funding each year for family-planning services. (That’s about one-third of the group’s operating budget.) The organization says it abides by federal rules that don’t allow the group to use the government funds for abortion services. But Pence says that the funds could be used to offset Planned Parenthood’s operational costs, freeing up money for abortion services.

Pence’s amendment failed, 189-231, but mustered significant support, including 20 Democrats who voted for the amendment. *Congressional Quarterly* called the showdown one of the biggest abortion fights since Democrats took over Congress.

Pence told WORLD he plans to introduce the amendment each year, following the example of William Wilberforce, who successfully fought the British slave trade: “He fought slavery and eventually won by taking the profit out of the slave trade.”

The congressman hopes his efforts will be bolstered by last month’s request by 60 pro-life leaders for Congress to

suspend Planned Parenthood’s federal funding while one of the group’s affiliates in Kansas faces a 107-count criminal complaint (see “One for the books,” Nov. 3).

Laser defends Planned Parenthood, saying the group provides care that prevents abortions. The pro-life Hunter doesn’t defend Planned Parenthood but does defend his support of the bill: “I think evangelicals have to ask: Can I go step by step instead of having the whole thing at one time?”

Hunter also says evangelicals should be willing to work with those they typically don’t engage, and he notes that he doesn’t agree with all of Third Way’s positions. For instance, the group has spoken out against the partial-birth abortion ban and the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, saying the bills have a “miniscule effect” on the abortion rate and “allow those on the right to dominate the abortion debate.”

“I’m horrified by that viewpoint,” says Hunter. “But the bottom line isn’t whether I agree with them on every point.”

In the meantime, Brownback and Kennedy are hoping both sides can easily agree on efforts like their legislation focused on Down syndrome education. Brownback hopes the measure will help reduce the nearly 4,000 abortions taking place each working day in America and will save the lives of more people like Jimmy: “Four thousand a day is a number—Jimmy’s a person.”



Pence



Hunter

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