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Mr. President, here is common ground on abortion!

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President Obama has reneged on an increasing number of his pledges on taking office - from guaranteeing a transparent, accountable administration to ending CIA "renditions" of suspects to foreign nations known for torture. Now, however, he has a golden chance to fulfill his often-repeated goal of achieving a "common ground" in the abortion wars.

Two pro-life Democrats - Congressman Lincoln Davis of Tennessee and Sen. Bob Casey of Pennsylvania - have introduced the Pregnant Women Support Act (HR 2035 in the House, S 2407 in the Senate). As Davis says, "It's not about pro-life or pro-choice." It's about "what we can do to bring a reduction to abortions."

To begin, as the Associated Press reported (March 25): "For many Americans, the recession is affecting the most intimate decisions about family planning...Planned Parenthood of Illinois clinics performed an all-time high number of abortions in January, many of them motivated by the women's economic worries."

Before this year, Davis has emphasized: "Of the 1.29 million abortions performed annually, 73 percent of women seeking abortions list economic factors as contributing to the decision to have an abortion."

Accordingly, as Davis reports (Johnson City Press, Feb. 19), the Pregnant Women Support Act would "Repeal the sunset on adoption tax credits and make them permanent ... fully Fund Federal WIC Program. Special Nutrition for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) ... and increase funding for domestic violence programs" (the latter violence against women often spurring abortions).

This literally life-saving legislation, in vital need of support from the president, would also end the denial to pregnant women of health care from insurance companies because of "pre-existing conditions."

Says Lincoln Davis: "A child is not a cancer. A child is not a heart attack. It's not diabetes. A child is a human being and is not a disease."

Like Davis, Bob Casey, an Obama campaign supporter, has reintroduced the Pregnant Women Support Act in the current Senate in the belief that "we can transform this debate by focusing on issues that united us, not the issues that divide us."

His list of what the bill actually contains is too long for the space I have, but here are sections that provide a crucial challenge to both pro-lifers and pro-choicers to focus their passions on real-life, real-time common ground.

The Pregnant Women Support Act, Casey notes, "creates a new pilot program for 'Life Support Centers' to offer comprehensive and supportive services for pregnant women, mothers and children.

"Establishes a national toll-free number and public awareness campaign to offer women support and knowledge about options and resources available to them when they face an unplanned pregnancy."

And listen to this, Mr. President: "Establish nurse home visitation for pregnant and first time mothers as an eligible benefit under Medicaid and SCHIP. One example of this is the Nurse-Family Partnership, an evidence-based program and national model in which nurses mentor young first-time and primarily

low-income mothers, establishing a supportive relationship with both mother and child.

"Studies have shown this program to be both cost effective and hugely successful in terms of life outcomes for both mothers and children."

Two additional parts of the Pregnant Women Support Act address mounting concerns. It will "assist pregnant and parenting teens to finish high school and prepare for college or vocational training" - and will "help pregnant college students stay in school, offering them counseling as well as assistance with continuing their education, parenting support and classes, and child care assistance."

Last year, during a crescendo in the abortion wars, Davis said (The Tennessean, Sept. 12, 2008): "People get angry and they scream and shout...and nothing gets done for the people we all say we care about. If we can pass this bill and get it implemented across the country, I believe we can dramatically reduce the number of abortions."

That same newspaper story told of 28-year-old Michelle Smith working two jobs while a full-time student at Volunteer State Community College, and deciding to have an abortion for economic reasons. But, at a Nashville Agency, Hope Clinic, for young women confronting unplanned abortions, she was given a pregnancy test and a sonogram.

"Once I saw my daughter's face," Michelle Smith said, "I knew I didn't want to have an abortion." (Note: The Pregnant Women Support Act would "give women free sonogram examinations by providing grants for the purchase of ultrasound equipment.")

As of this writing, Obama has given no indication that he will back the Pregnant Women Support Act. If you really believe in reducing pregnancies, stiffen your back, Mr. President.

Now a parent of a lively 2-year-old, Michelle Smith says: "She never ceases to amaze me." That happens to me every time I see my newest grandchild, 4-year-old Ruby Hentoff.
