



Promoting Safe Motherhood

As the father of two daughters, I know that the birth of a child is one of the greatest moments in a parent's life. Yet too often, women experience a major medical complication during their pregnancy.

Of the four million women who give birth in the United States, over one-third have a pregnancy-related complication before, during, or after delivery. Sadly, two to three women die of pregnancy related complications every day.

The SMART Mom Act would help ensure that the birth of a child can be the happy and joyful event it should be.

In a nation as wealthy as ours, this simply shouldn't be the case. Yet the United States ranks only 20th in maternal mortality rates out of 49 developed countries - behind Singapore, Malta, and Cyprus. We must do more to promote safe motherhood in America.

The scariest part of the problem is we can't answer the most basic questions – what causes these complications, what can we do to prevent them, and how can we treat them?

One common complication is preeclampsia, or high blood pressure. We know that some women are at greater risk than others for this complication. We also know some steps that can be taken to reduce a woman's risk. Yet we know shamefully little, with the exception of inducing labor, of how to treat this problem. The fact that there has been a 40 percent increase in the incidence of preeclampsia over the past 10 years and we don't know anything more today than we did a decade ago is simply unacceptable.

Likewise, we know almost nothing about which prescription drugs are safe for the fetus and effective for the mother. Most prescription drugs women take during pregnancy are necessary to maintain health. Yet only one percent of drugs have shown no risk to pregnant women and their babies. Equally disturbing, 80 percent of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approved drugs tested in controlled studies lack adequate scientific evidence about use in pregnancy.

While people in Washington tend to throw around statistics to make a point, it is important to remember that behind each of these statistics is a real person and family.

I recently spoke with several Iowa mothers, including Amy Brandstetter from Le Claire, Amy Wichman from Bettendorf, Donna Malone from Des Moines, and Kara Bahr from Johnston. These moms talked about their frustration with a health care system that fails to meet some of the most basic needs of pregnant women. It is shameful that there isn't more accurate and more widely available information for women and their providers.

To address these problems, I have introduced legislation called the Safe Motherhood Act for Research and Treatment, or SMART Mom Act. The SMART Mom Act will address these concerns by:

- Increasing research to learn how to prevent, treat, and cure pregnancy related complications;
- Providing comprehensive information to pregnant women, health care providers, and the public; and,
- Improving information about medication and medical devices use for pregnant women.

Pregnancy is a natural and wonderful occurrence in a woman's life. We must take steps toward ensuring pregnancies and healthy outcomes for America's women. The SMART Mom Act would help ensure that the birth of a child can be the happy and joyful event it should be.