

Florida bishops support governor

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (CNS) — Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and the state's legislators "have bravely risked erring on the side of protecting life" in the case of Terri Schindler Schiavo, the Catholic bishops of Florida said in an Oct. 23 statement.

"We applaud this courage and pray with them that clarity and resolution will follow in this tragic case," they added. "It is our ardent hope that while the judicial system further considers this extraordinary and extremely difficult case, that a true and convincing picture of Terri's wishes and her condition will emerge."

Schiavo, 39, resumed receiving nutrition and hydration through a feeding tube Oct. 23 at a Pinellas Park nursing home, where she returned after a brief stay at Morton Plant Hospital in Clearwater to receive intravenous fluids.

Her feeding tube had been removed Oct. 15 by court order, but an executive order by Bush rescinded the removal.

Bush acted after the Florida Legislature passed a law allowing the governor's intervention in cases in which the patient left no living will, is in a persistent vegetative state and has had nutrition and hydration tubes removed and where a family member has challenged the removal.

The Florida bishops noted in their statement, however, that "the statutory definition of persistent vegetative state does not square with clin-

ical diagnoses of this condition."

Schiavo's parents, Bob and Mary Schindler, have been fighting efforts by Terri's husband, Michael Schiavo, to remove her feeding tube for more than three years. The Schindlers say that Terri is neither comatose nor in a persistent vegetative state.

Terri Schiavo had been on a feeding tube since 1990, when she collapsed at her home in St. Petersburg due to what doctors believe was a potassium imbalance, causing her brain to be deprived of oxygen for several minutes.

Terri Schiavo's sister, Suzanne Carr, called the Legislature's vote "a miracle, an absolute miracle."

Ray Flynn, president of Your Catholic Voice and former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, said the decision was "a victory for all Americans who believe in a culture of life."

"Thanks to the Florida Legislature and Gov. Jeb Bush, Terri Schiavo will not be a victim of judicial homicide," Flynn added in a statement.

Members of the Catholic Medical Association, at their annual meeting Oct. 17 in Philadelphia, passed a resolution saying that removal of Schiavo's feeding tube "without the opportunity to determine whether she could be taught to eat and drink by mouth constitutes depriving her of life without due process of law."

The resolution said "the court order authorizing taking the life of Terri Schiavo by ending her feeding should be rescinded" and said "her



Reuters/CNS

Members of the media surround Florida Gov. Jeb Bush in Tallahassee Oct. 21 as he awaits passage of a state bill that would allow him to intervene in the Terri Schiavo case.

ability to be nourished by oral feeding should be properly evaluated."

In an earlier statement, the Florida Catholic bishops had urged that artificial nutrition and hydration be continued until "a more clear understanding of her actual physical condition" could be reached.

They cited church teaching that "there should be a presumption in favor of providing medically assisted nutrition and hydration to all patients as long as it is of sufficient benefit to outweigh the burdens involved to the patient."

The Florida Legislature, which had been called into special session to discuss economic matters, also decided to act on the Schiavo case. The Senate's 23-15 vote in favor of the emergency legislation Oct. 21 was followed minutes later by the House approval, 73-24. Bush signed

the legislation and issued the executive order a little more than an hour later.

George Felos, attorney for Michael Schiavo, said his client was "absolutely stunned at the course of events" and "deeply troubled, angry and saddened that his wife's wishes have become a political ping-pong."

It was not immediately clear whether the six days without food or water would cause permanent damage to Terri Schiavo's system.

Msgr. Thaddeus Malanowski, a family friend of the Schindlers, gave Terri Schiavo the anointing of the sick Oct. 15 and touched a relic of Mother Teresa to her forehead, cheek and throat.

When he visited her Oct. 20, Msgr. Malanowski said, Terri Schiavo's skin did not retract when pinched, a sign her condition had deteriorated.

Monroe County budget cuts may affect CFC

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Monroe County's proposed 2004 budget, which was presented Oct. 17 by County Executive Jack Doyle, includes a funding reduction of \$341,233 for diocesan Catholic Charities.

According to James Smith, Doyle's spokesman, funding for Catholic Charities was not reduced in Doyle's original budget. However, Smith said a total of \$4.8 million in program cuts were made because Democratic lawmakers refused to approve a bond sale that would have provided funds for county retirement and pension expenses.

"That was a last-minute issue," Smith said. "There were cuts that

had not been anticipated, and (Catholic Charities) was one of them."

The Catholic Charities cuts target programs at Catholic Family Center, which provides human services and advocacy primarily in Monroe County. Carolyn Portanova, CFC's president and chief executive officer, said she has heard "from a number of sources, but never officially" that CFC's Preventive Services would be most affected by the cuts. The program, which provides services under contract with the county's Department of Health and Human Services, helps families keep their children out of foster care.

Portanova said she's hoping "there will be opportunities to discuss" re-

instatement of Catholic Charities funding, and Smith said there is a possibility that the funds can be restored. "Were the Legislature to act on the bonding issues, they could easily be restored. The dollars are there," Smith said.

This would be welcome news to Portanova, whose agency has been targeted by county budget cuts in recent years. Last year proposed cuts to CFC funding totaled \$900,000; Portanova said most, but not all, the funding was restored.

The county legislature will vote on the budget Nov. 12. Lawmakers have approximately one month to agree upon the final budget; otherwise Doyle's proposed budget would automatically take effect.

Another budget element that could adversely affect people served by Catholic Charities is Doyle's proposed increase in the county sales tax, from 8.25 to 8.85 percent, beginning in March 2004. Doyle said this is necessary to help close a budget gap of more than \$40 million.

Portanova said that the tax increase "would hit our clients very hard." Meanwhile, Jack Balinsky, director of diocesan Catholic Charities, said the 0.6-percent rise stands to have a "disproportionate effect on the poor."

Balinsky said he is not aware of similar budgetary struggles affecting Catholic Charities agencies in other parts of the 12-county Diocese of Rochester.

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