

## Pro-Life News in Brief

BY Liz Townsend

### Minnesota and Michigan Abortion Numbers Decline

In keeping with a national trend, the number of abortions in both Minnesota and Michigan dropped in 2005. With 25,209, the number of abortions in Michigan was the lowest since records began being kept in the 1970s, while Minnesota's 13,362 abortions totaled the lowest since 1975, according to the Associated Press.

"More women are deciding to give life to their unborn babies in our state and this is a positive trend," said Scott Fischbach, Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life (MCCL) executive director. "The recent passage of life-affirming legislation to inform and support pregnant women is empowering them to give life to their unborn babies."

Laws that pro-lifers believe helped reduce the number of abortions include the Women's Right to Know Act, which provides women with detailed information about their babies and a 24-hour waiting period.

One negative trend reported by Minnesota's Health Department was that more women are receiving taxpayer funding for abortions. Taxpayers paid for 3,840 abortions in 2005, or 28.7% of the total.

MCCL supports the proposed Abortion Regulation Act, which would ban nearly all public assistance for abortions. The act has passed twice in the House this session, but has been blocked in the Senate.

"Today's report underscores the need to pass the Abortion Regulation Act," Fischbach said. "Taxpayer funding has become a blank check for the abortion industry to perform abortions on every poor pregnant woman. The state must act to put a stop to this exploitation of the poor." In 1995 Minnesota's Supreme Court not only found a "right" to abortion in the state Constitution, the justices also ruled that taxpayers must fund abortions for low-income women. Even *Roe v. Wade* is not that extreme. The Abortion Regulation Act would ban nearly all taxpayer funded abortions.

MCCL has passed a parental notice law, which lowered the number of adolescent abortions, and in 2005 a Positive Alternatives Law. That new law created a grant program within the Minnesota Department of Health available to life-affirming organizations. Good things are happening in Michigan as well.

"We are extremely grateful for the decrease in abortions," said Right to Life of Michigan President Barbara Listing. "Each and every abortion destroys an innocent, irreplaceable human life. The fact the fewer women are having abortions in Michigan shows that more and more Michigan women are embracing the gift of life."

In Michigan, public funding of most abortions was banned in 1988, and abortions have been declining since then, according to the Detroit Free Press. Over 49,000 Michigan babies were aborted in 1987, which has declined to 25,209 in 2005.

Michigan also has laws that help women choose life, such as parental notification and informed consent. The state also recently enacted the Ultrasound Viewing Option law, which will allow women considering abortion to see live images of their babies.

### **Hwang Trial Begins in Korea**

The trial of once-lauded researcher Hwang Woo-suk began in Seoul, South Korea, June 20. As Hwang is tried on charges of fraud, embezzlement, and ethics violations, his lawyer announced that he will resume animal cloning experiments in a private lab on July 4 or 5, Korea Times reported.

Hwang's downfall came after "breakthrough" papers in the journal Science, claiming that he cloned the first human embryo and extracted viable stem cell lines, were proven to be false. During testimony June 20, Hwang asserted that his junior researchers were the ones who faked the data.

"I was not involved in the process, I just received results," Hwang said, according to the Associated Press (AP). "I fully trusted (my colleagues) without doubts, but it was clearly my mistake to approve the results."

Prosecutors contend that Hwang embezzled the 2.8 billion won (\$2.91 million) he received in state and private funds by using it for fraudulent research, Reuters reported. They charge he also violated ethics regulations by using some of that money to pay women for their ova.

Just one week after the trial began, Hwang's lawyer Lee Geon-haeng announced that Hwang will start a new research program. "Hwang has already established his lab in Seoul," Lee told the Times. "Approximately 30 researchers, mostly Hwang's former associates, will join it. Hwang looks to start with animal cloning experiments but he may work on human stem cell research later."

Despite his plans, however, South Korea's Health Ministry has revoked Hwang's research license, meaning he cannot clone human embryos or obtain human eggs for research, the AP reported.

"By law, Hwang won't be able to start such research again," Kim Young-ho, told the AP.

### **Chinese Woman Dies while Escaping Forced Abortion**

A Chinese woman, pregnant with twins, plunged to her death June 22 from the second floor of a hospital where she had been taken for a forced abortion, the Associated Press (AP) reported. Li Shimei was already the mother of an older child, and her unborn twins' birth would have violated China's coercive "one-child" policy.

Li was removed from her home in Hefei and brought to Shuguang Hospital for an abortion, according to the AP. When she tried to flee before the abortion took place, she fell. A hospital employee confirmed that a woman died there, but would give no further details, the AP reported.

The Hong Kong-based group Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy reported to case to the media. The group told the AP that Hefei police are investigating Li's death.

### **Sex-Selection Abortions Allowed in China**

A proposed law to ban sex-selection abortions in China will not come to a vote in the National People's Congress because "many controversies remain," according to Xinhua news agency.

Currently, “family planning” regulations prohibit such abortions, but there are no punishments outlined and the regulations do not carry the force of law, the Associated Press reported.

Early versions of the draft amendment would have imposed fines and up to three years of jail for those involved in identifying the gender of unborn babies for non-medical reasons, according to Xinhua. Many babies identified as girls through prenatal ultrasound are aborted in China, which has caused a large imbalance in the ratio of boys to girls in the country.

Some lawmakers and others criticized the proposed law by saying it would merely drive sex-selection abortions “underground,” Financial Times reported. They also claimed that couples would merely cite other reasons to cover up an abortion for gender reasons.

Because of China’s one-child policy, families want their baby to be a boy so he can carry on the family name and provide for the parents when they are elderly, according to Xinhua.

### **Baby Born Healthy Weeks after Attempted Abortion**

A Swedish doctor, who told a mother her unborn baby had died in utero, discovered the child was very much alive as he began an abortion.

The Ystad doctor immediately stopped the abortion procedure and the pregnancy continued, according to Swedish newspaper The Local.

The unidentified woman later developed a placental infection, and the baby was delivered by emergency Caesarean section 10 weeks early, The Local reported. Tests have shown that the baby is developing normally.

The hospital where the abortion was almost performed has now changed its policy to require that two ultrasounds are conducted to determine if a baby has died.

### **High Court Lets Stand Rulings Approving Choose Life License Plates**

The U.S. Supreme Court declined June 26 to consider cases against “Choose Life” license plates in Tennessee and Louisiana. The High Court’s refusal means that lower courts’ approval of the plates will stand, bringing pro-life drivers one step closer to installing the plates on their cars.

“This victory allows the government to advertise a pro-life message without having to also endorse a ‘pro-choice’ position in its social, economic, and educational programs,” said James Bopp, Jr., lead counsel for New Life Resources, the pro-life group that will receive 50% of the Tennessee plates’ proceeds to promote adoption.

“The ‘Choose Life’ message is similar to messages like ‘Don’t Smoke’ or ‘Don’t Do Drugs,’ as we successfully argued in the Court of Appeals,” said Bopp. “With the Supreme Court decision today, there is now no reason why Choose Life programs can’t be enacted in other states in the same way as Tennessee did so.”

Tennessee Department of Safety spokeswoman Julie Oaks told The Tennessean that it will take about three months to get the plates to the 1,265 drivers who have ordered them. There will be minor changes to the design to make the plate numbers more visible, she said. The plates have a drawing of a laughing child with the words “Choose Life.”

The Louisiana case still has to be decided in state courts. Pro-abortion challengers there are arguing that the entire system of specialty tags—which are allowed only for messages approved by the legislature—is unconstitutional, according to the New Orleans Times-Picayune.

Legislatures in both Tennessee and Louisiana rejected proposals for pro-abortion "Choose Choice" license plates.

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### **Scientists Debunk Chinese Doctor's Fetal Cell Treatments**

A team of doctors investigating Chinese doctor Hongyun Huang, who uses cells from aborted babies to treat brain and spinal cord injuries, have found no evidence that his costly and controversial treatments are effective, according to a report in the March issue of *Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair*.

Huang extracts "olfactory ensheathing cells" from aborted babies, the Boston Globe reported. These cells, intended to promote nerve repair, are then inserted in Huang's patients after he drills holes in their skulls or necks to reach the brain and spinal cord. Huang charges more than \$20,000 for these treatments.

Drs. Bruce H. Dobkin, Armin Curt, and James Guest studied seven patients before and after their treatments. Although patients reported some lessening of symptoms, scientific tests showed that none of them had any meaningful improvements, according to the Globe. Dobkin told the newspaper that the patients' reports are likely explained by the placebo effect.

The authors reported several disturbing findings. In a patient seeking treatment for spinal cord injury, Huang instead drilled holes in his head and inserted the cells in his brain, the Globe

reported. Another patient who sought help for a bladder problem had a hole drilled in her neck and cells injected in her spinal cord.

"It is just nonsense," Dobkin told the Globe. "That he would even agree to do this is really frightening to me."

Huang refused to answer direct questions put to him by the Globe, but said the doctors were lying.