

Pro-Life News in Brief

By Liz Townsend

European Union Approves Embryonic Stem Cell Research Funding

Due to a last-minute compromise by Germany, Italy, and Slovenia, the European Council approved funding July 24 for embryonic stem cell research on cell lines that have already been obtained by killing tiny unborn babies, according to the Associated Press (AP). If the European Parliament approves the plan in November, the European Union (EU) will not use its \$65 billion research budget on projects that actually destroy the embryos, but will fund activities that make use of the lethally obtained cells.

Embryonic stem cell research will continue to be funded "under the current case-by-case practice, forbidding research into human cloning and research that would result in heritable changes," according to EurActiv.com. "No activity will be funded that is forbidden in all member states and research projects will only be considered for funding from member states where the research is legal."

Five member states--Poland, Austria, Malta, Slovakia, and Lithuania--refused to back the compromise and voted against the proposal for "ethical and moral" reasons, the AP reported. "Do we really want 300-400 fertilised human embryos to be destroyed to create stem cells?" said Austrian minister Elisabeth Gehrler said, according to The Guardian. "This destruction of human embryos to create stem cell lines is not something we can support. We do not want community money, which includes Austrian money, to support this."

Austria had been joined in its opposition by Germany, until the states supporting the research agreed to ban the funding of research that actively kills the embryos. "We can agree once there is a clear statement that there can be no financial incentives for the destruction of embryos," said German science minister Annette Schavan, The Guardian reported. In the last seven years, the EU has funded nine research projects using embryonic stem cells, according to the AP.

Body of Discarded Baby Found at Abortion Clinic

Acting on an anonymous tip, police in Hialeah, Florida, discovered the body of 2-3 pound baby boy in a biohazard container at the A Gyn Diagnostic Center abortion clinic July 28. They found the baby in a second search of the facility, finding nothing the first time, leading to suspicions that clinic staff tampered with evidence, according to CBS4 News.

"In 24 years in law enforcement, I have never seen a case like this," Hialeah Detective Tony Rodriguez, the lead investigator, told CBS4 News.

As a result of the investigation, the abortion clinic voluntarily surrendered its license to practice medicine in early August, according to the Miami Herald. The clinic's management, however, is still operating other abortion clinics in South Florida.

Police discovered the baby's mother was an 18-year-old girl who went to the clinic on July 20 for an abortion. She was 23 weeks pregnant. Returning the next day complaining of severe pain, clinic staff told her the doctor was not available and took her to a recovery room to wait, CBS4 News reported. She gave birth to the baby there.

"Employees cut the umbilical cord, put the baby in a bag and walked away with it," Hialeah Lt. Ralph Garcia told CBS4 News.

Police received an anonymous tip on July 21 that the baby was born alive and possibly killed, according to CBS4 News. After searching the clinic, police left without finding anything. One week later, they received a second call about the baby, and found the discarded body.

An autopsy was performed on the baby at the Miami-Dade Medical Examiner's Office July 29, but it may be weeks before the results are released, the Herald reported. The medical examiner will try to determine whether the baby was born alive and how he died.

"The state attorney's office is still reviewing the case, along with the medical examiner," Mark Overton, Hialeah's deputy police chief, told the Herald. "We are awaiting test results. Once they are back, they will be making a decision on what charges will be filed, if any."

Amnesty International to Consider Adopting Pro-Abortion Policy

Pro-life supporters of Amnesty International (AI) are protesting strongly against reports that the human rights group is planning to endorse the "right" to abortion at its next international meeting in August 2007.

According to documents sent to members, AI has proposed that the group should call for the "global decriminalization of abortion" and that "there should be abortion on demand in cases involving sexual assault or risk to a woman's life," CanWest News Service reported.

"Governments have responsibilities to ensure that everyone's sexual and reproductive rights are protected," the documents assert, according to CanWest News Service "No one should be discriminated against when and if they attempt to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights, or ask that they be protected."

Many AI members expressed great opposition to any proposal endorsing abortion, saying that it is inconsistent with the group's proclaimed mission, found on its web site, of "preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights."

"I have great esteem for Amnesty, but doing this, they cut off their hands," Cardinal Renato Martino of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice told Reuters. "I hope they don't do this because if they do, they are disqualified as defenders of human rights."

"When they say 'reproductive rights,' they mean abortion. Do they defend the rights of everybody? No. Not of the unborn, because the unborn will be killed."

AI branches in New Zealand, Britain, and Canada have already voted to allow their representatives to consider the issue at the August 2007 AI meeting, according to the Vancouver Province. Pro-life members of AI have said they will resign if the pro-abortion proposals are adopted at the international level.

"If Amnesty International moves in such a direction, then the ultimate tragic irony results: a world-wide organization which has done such a good job at standing in solidarity with and helping to protect individual and human communities whose human rights are under attack is moving against those who are arguably the most innocent and defence-less victims--the unborn infants of the world," the Most Rev. Raymond Roussin, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Vancouver, told the Province.

"I can only pray and hope that [they] will rethink such a drastic and sad proposed decision, which would to my mind cut the heart out of the purpose of Amnesty International."

Brownback Introduces Bill to End Use of Federal Drugs to Assist Suicide

Senator Sam Brownback (R-Ks.) August 3 introduced S. 3788, the "Assisted Suicide Prevention Act of 2006," to prevent the use of federally controlled narcotics and other dangerous drugs to assist suicide.

Federally controlled drugs may only be prescribed for a "legitimate medical purpose." A 2001 ruling by the Bush Administration that assisting suicide is not such a purpose was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court earlier this year. The Court majority held that Congress had not contemplated the law's application to assisting suicide when the Controlled Substances Act was passed, but affirmed that Congress could constitutionally amend the Act to do so.

The Brownback bill stresses that "alleviating pain or discomfort in the usual course of professional practice is a legitimate medical purpose for ... a controlled substance ... , even if use of such substance may increase the risk of death." Its sole remedy for use of federally controlled substances to assist suicide would be to make the violator ineligible to prescribe federally controlled drugs in the future, and it would require proof by clear and convincing evidence that the practitioner prescribed the drug for the stated or undisputed purpose of assisting suicide or causing death.

Senator Ron Wyden (D-Or.) has made clear that he will stage a filibuster against any such legislation, meaning that 60 of the 100 senators would have to vote to stop debate in order for the bill to pass.

British Medical Association Opposes Euthanasia

Members of the British Medical Association (BMA) voted June 29 to oppose any legislation that would legalize physician-assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia, according to the Press Association (PA).

On a 65%-35% vote, doctors attending the BMA conference in Belfast overturned a neutral position adopted in 2005 and asserted that the law should not allow doctors to help patients kill themselves.

Other votes reinforced the BMA's new anti-euthanasia position. Eighty-two percent of the doctors supported the position that if euthanasia were legalized, there must be a "clear demarcation" between doctors who would be involved and those who refuse, PA reported. In addition, in an overwhelming vote of 92%-6%, the doctors asserted that nonvoluntary euthanasia should not become legal in Britain.

Many of the doctors expressed concern that legalizing physician-assisted suicide would cause vulnerable people to seek death so they won't be a "burden" to their loved ones. "My worry is

that a right to die will become a duty to die, a duty to unburden their families," Dr. Andrew Davies of Cardiff told PA.

Others asserted that doctors need to use more effective treatments to relieve pain and reduce suffering. "If good palliative care is provided, requests for euthanasia are extremely rare," Dr. Peter Saunders, general secretary of the Christian Medical

Fellowship, told BBC News. "We should be doing all we can to make sure that this care is made more widely available."

Pro-life groups in Britain applauded the BMA's vote. "Suffering, sick and disabled people need to be able to trust their doctors to give the best possible treatment, and not to collude in the fallacy that our lives have no value," said Alison Davis, national coordinator of No Less Human, the disability rights group of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children.

"What we really need is medical help to live with dignity until we die naturally. The BMA's decision will help to keep vulnerable people safe, and will give lie to the claim that vulnerable people are 'dignified' only in death."

Australian Abortionist on Trial for Manslaughter

Sydney abortionist Suman Sood is on trial for manslaughter after a 23-week-old unborn baby was delivered in a toilet after Sood allegedly gave the mother a drug and told her to return the next day to complete the abortion. Prosecutors contend that the abortion was illegal because Sood did not determine that the abortion was necessary to protect the woman's life or health, which is required under New South Wales law, the Australian Associated Press (AAP) reported.

Sood allegedly gave abortion-inducing drugs to the unidentified 20-year-old woman in May 2002, telling the woman to return home and come back to Australian Women's Health Clinic in Sydney the next day. During the night the woman had severe abdominal pains and called Sood, who told her to take pain medication, according to the Daily Telegraph.

However, at about 3 a.m., the woman delivered the 23-week-old baby at her home, the Daily Telegraph reported. Mother and baby were taken to the hospital. However, the baby boy weighed only 520 grams (1.15 pounds) and died at 8 a.m.

The woman testified that Sood was the only abortionist who would abort the over 20-week-old unborn baby, and asked to be paid \$1,500 for the procedure, according to the AAP. The woman made one visit on May 18, when a nurse spoke with her. Two days later, she returned to the clinic and met with Sood.

According to the woman, "Sood did not physically examine her, ask why she wanted the abortion, whether she had considered other options, or what her personal circumstances were," the AAP reported. Sood merely gave her three pills, one vaginally and two orally. "She said it will make the baby come out easier," the woman testified, according to the AAP.

Sood, however, insists that she merely gave the woman a pain reliever and was planning to refer her to a clinic in Queensland for a late-term abortion, the AAP reported.

After she failed to return to the clinic the next day, the woman testified, Sood called her on her cell phone. "She asked me if I was still coming in for the termination," the woman told the court, the AAP reported. "I said: 'No, I've already had the baby.' She asked me: 'What's going to happen with the extra \$100 that I owed her for the tablets.' I said: 'I don't know.' She hung up."

As of press time, the trial was still in progress.

Austrian Doctor May Pay Support for Disabled Child

An Austrian mother whose daughter was born with Down syndrome is suing her gynecologist for child support, asserting that she would have aborted her daughter if he had given her complete information about the risk of her baby having the condition, according to the Associated Press (AP).

The unidentified gynecologist advised the 31-year-old mother to have further tests, rather than "providing her with full information" about potential conditions, the AP reported. When she finally had the tests and the baby was diagnosed with Down syndrome, it was too late for an abortion.

The Austrian Supreme Court announced July 12 that a lower court can order the doctor to pay child support for the now-nine-year-old girl if it finds that the mother would have had an abortion if the doctor gave her all the details, according to the AP.

The doctor could be liable for child support indefinitely, since Austrian law requires financial assistance until the child can support herself. The girl was born with Down syndrome, which can cause learning and speech problems, along with a heart defect and intestinal obstruction, the AP reported.

"It is very possible that the doctor didn't want to unnecessarily concern the young mother," Gerhard Marschuetz of Vienna University told the Kurier. "From now on even when there is the slightest sign of a risk, doctors will call attention to special checkups."

European Bishops Condemn Assisted Suicide

Bishops from neighboring cities in Germany, Switzerland, and France issued a joint pastoral letter July 3 condemning assisted suicide.

"All humans were obliged to respect the principle of the sanctity of human life and the rights of the chronically ill and dying," said Archbishop Robert Zollitsch of Freiburg, Germany; Archbishop Joseph Doré of Strasbourg, France; and Bishop Kurt Koch of Basel, Switzerland, according to Deutsche Welle.

The Catholic officials were concerned because of the increasing number of deaths associated with the Swiss group Dignitas, which has "helped" hundreds of people, even from foreign countries, to die. Switzerland has the most permissive laws in Europe regarding assisted suicide, Deutsche Welle reported.

"At present, sick, suffering and dying people are seen as a burden to be disposed of," Archbishop Zollitsch said at a July 3 press conference, according to Deutsche Welle.

"Death should not be caused, or supported by a doctor," stated Archbishop Doré.

Californians to Vote on Parental Notification

Voters in California will have a second chance in November to approve a ballot proposition requiring minors to notify a parent before an abortion. In November 2005, a similar proposal was narrowly defeated, 52.6%-47.4%.

This year's Proposition 85 (sponsored by Jim Holman of San Diego) would require an abortionist to notify a minor's parent or guardian in writing when the girl requests an abortion and then wait 48 hours, according to the San Mateo Daily Journal. The waiting period could be waived if the parent goes to the abortion clinic with the girl and signs a notification form. In addition, a judge could waive the notification requirement.

The proposition also requires the minor to consent to the abortion, according to The Tidings. A minor girl who was coerced into seeking an abortion could get a court order refusing to allow the abortion to be performed.

A parental consent law was previously passed in California in 1987, but it was challenged in the courts. The California Supreme Court ruled the law unconstitutional in 1997, the Daily Journal reported.

The California Labor Federation, the largest labor union in the state, voted during its July meeting to change its formerly neutral position and oppose Proposition 85, according to the Los Angeles Times. The federation contended that "parental notification laws make teenagers choose between talking with parents or having illegal and unsafe abortions" and resolved "that the Federation work within the Labor movement and with like minded allies to protect, provide education for, and defend a full range of reproductive health care services to females of all ages."

Several of the federation's 1,100 affiliated unions refused to endorse the resolution and will remain neutral on abortion. "We take positions only on things that directly affect working people," Bob Balgenorth, president of the State Building and Construction Trades Council of California, told the Times.

Pro-lifers hope that the proposition will succeed this year, saying that contentious political issues in 2005 contributed to the close defeat. "The political climate is better," Carol Hogan, communications director for the bishops' California Catholic Conference, told The Tidings. "Many [parental notification initiative] proponents think their Prop 73 initiative lost last year because of a referendum on Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's unpopular reform measures."

Schwarzenegger Pledges \$150 Million for Embryo Research

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger ordered the state finance director July 20 to provide a \$150 million loan to the agency that oversees embryonic stem cell research grants. The California Institute of Regenerative Medicine (CRIM), established after voters approved a \$3 billion embryonic stem cell program, will now invite more grant proposals for research that uses cells extracted by killing the tiniest human beings.

The money approved by voters has been tied up in lawsuits filed by groups that oppose the use of embryonic stem cells and the use of such a large amount of taxpayer money by a quasi-independent organization, according to the Contra Costa Times. A Superior Court judge ruled in April that the program is constitutional, but the opponents have appealed.

If the litigation is successful, the \$150 million loan will not be paid back to the state, the Los Angeles Times reported.

Schwarzenegger's letter to Finance Director Mike Genest authorized the loan for the destructive research while using the word "embryonic" only once. "California is poised to lead not only this country, but all countries, on stem cell research," Schwarzenegger wrote. "I remain committed to advancing stem cell research in California, in the promise it holds for

millions of our citizens who suffer from chronic diseases and injuries that could be helped as a result of stem cell research."

"Unfortunately, Mr. Schwarzenegger's comments belie the true nature of this government debacle," Brian Johnston of the California ProLife Council told NRL News. "These funds are not allowed to go to the stem-cell research that has shown the most success, the use of so called 'adult stem cells.' Instead these funds are restricted to only be used on stem cells taken from human embryos. Mr. Schwarzenegger is committing vast sums of taxpayer money to a program that, by design, will only fund research which the federal government finds to be unethical."

The CIRM approved its first 16 grants in April using money raised by selling "bond anticipation notes," according to the Associated Press, which also will not be paid back if the proposition is declared unconstitutional.

Woman Charged with Killing Mother and Unborn Child

A Pennsylvania woman has been charged with multiple offenses in the killing of 22-year-old Cari Chapman and her unborn baby July 31 in Franklin Township. Patricia Stark, 22, is still at large after she fled the scene of the shooting, according to the Times-Leader.

Chapman was less than 16 weeks pregnant, so a death certificate will not be issued for the child, according to Pennsylvania law. However, despite the lack of a death certificate, prosecutors are still able to charge Stark with the baby's death under a 1997 "criminal homicide of an unborn child" statute, the Times-Leader reported.

One theory for the shooting involves another homicide, committed in the early morning hours of July 31. Samantha Banellis, 21, was killed in Jenkins Township, allegedly by Charles Harris, Stark's boyfriend. A witness told police that Chapman had been seen with Harris before Banellis was shot. "She [Chapman] wasn't a witness to the [Banellis] shooting but she was questioned, yes," state police Cpl. Leo Hannon Jr. told the Times-Leader.

According to the criminal complaint, Stark called Chapman and another friend, Thomas M. Ohop Jr., later that afternoon and told them she "wanted to get away from Harris," the Times-Leader reported. They picked her up and Stark directed them to drive to a rural area, where she shot Chapman and Ohop.

Chapman and her baby were shot repeatedly and died at the scene, while Ohop was hit in the shoulder and abdomen. Stark took the keys to the car from Ohop and left the scene, according to the Times-Leader. Ohop flagged down another car and called police.

Stark has been charged with "criminal homicide, criminal homicide of an unborn child, criminal attempt to commit homicide, robbery of a motor vehicle and two counts of aggravated assault," the Times-Leader reported. Prosecutors could seek the death penalty if they can prove that Stark knew about the pregnancy.