

Re: Terri

What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

Dateline: Monday, April 04, 2005

by Paul R Ehrlich

Like many of you, I have been compelled by recent events to prepare a more detailed advance directive dealing with end-of-life issues. Here's what mine says:

- In the event I lapse into a persistent vegetative state, I want medical authorities to resort to extraordinary means to prolong my hellish semi-existence. Fifteen years wouldn't be long enough for me.
- I want my wife and my parents to compound their misery by engaging in a bitter and protracted feud that depletes their emotions and their bank accounts.
- I want my wife to ruin the rest of her life by maintaining an interminable vigil at my bedside. I'd be really jealous if she waited less than a decade to start dating again or otherwise rebuilding a semblance of a normal life.
- I want my case to be turned into a circus by losers and crackpots from around the country who hope to bring meaning to their empty lives by investing the same transient emotion in me that they once reserved for Laci Peterson, Chandra Levy, and that little girl who got stuck in a well.
- I want those crackpots to spread vicious lies about my wife.
- I want to be placed in a hospice where protesters can gather to bring further grief and disruption to the lives of dozens of dying patients and families whose stories are sadder than my own.
- I want the people who attach themselves to my case because of their deep devotion to the sanctity of life to make death threats against any judges, elected officials or health care professionals who disagree with them.
- I want the medical geniuses and philosopher kings who populate the Florida Legislature to ignore me for more than a decade and then turn my case into a forum for weeks of politically calculated bloviation.
- I want total strangers -- oily politicians, maudlin news anchors, ersatz friars, and all other hangers-on -- to start calling me "Bobby", as if they had known me since childhood.
- I'm not insisting on this as part of my directive, but it would be nice if Congress passed a "Bobby's Law" that applied only to me and ignored the medical needs of tens of millions of other Americans without adequate health coverage.
- Even if the "Bobby's Law" idea doesn't work out, I want Congress -- especially all those self-described conservatives who claim to believe in "less government and more freedom" -- to trample on the decisions of doctors, judges and other experts who actually know something about my case. And I want members of Congress to launch into an extended debate that gives them another excuse to avoid pesky issues such as national security and the economy.

- In particular, I want House Majority Leader Tom DeLay to use my case as an opportunity to divert the country's attention from the mounting political and legal troubles stemming from his slimy misbehavior.
- And I want Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist to make a mockery of his Harvard medical degree by misrepresenting the details of my case in ways that might give a boost to his 2008 presidential campaign.
- I want Frist and the rest of the world to judge my medical condition on the basis of a snippet of dated and demeaning videotape that should have remained private.
- Because I think I would retain my sense of humor even in a persistent vegetative state, I'd want President Bush -- the same guy who publicly mocked Karla Faye Tucker when signing off on her death warrant as governor of Texas -- to claim he was intervening in my case because it is always best "to err on the side of life."
- I want the state Department of Children and Families to step in at the last moment to take responsibility for my well-being, because nothing bad could ever happen to anyone under DCF's care.
- And because Gov. Jeb Bush is the smartest and most righteous human being on the face of the Earth, I want any and all of the aforementioned directives to be disregarded, if the governor happens to disagree with them. If he says he knows what's best for me, I won't be in any position to argue.

Paul R Ehrlich is President of the Center for Conservation Biology and Bing Professor of Population Studies at Stanford University, Stanford, CA USA