

Schiavo Defender Allowed His Father to Die

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, the driving force behind an effort in Congress to intervene in a Florida right-to-die dispute, faced a similar decision 16 years ago when his father was diagnosed in a persistent vegetative state following an accident at his home.

The *Los Angeles Times* on Sunday [reported](#) that the family decided not to connect 65-year-old Charles Ray DeLay to a dialysis machine in order to prolong his life.

DeLay's father suffered severe brain damage in an accident while testing a new backyard tram to carry family and friends down a 200-foot incline at his home in Canyon, Texas. Doctors reportedly told the family that if he survived, the patriarch would "basically be a vegetable."

Like Terri Schiavo, the woman who suffered severe brain damage when her heart failed due to a rare medical condition in 1990, the elder DeLay did not leave behind a living will. And like Schiavo's husband, family members said their loved one wouldn't want to be kept alive by artificial means.

According to the newspaper, the DeLay medical report said "extraordinary measures to prolong his life were not initiated," citing "agreement with the family's wishes." A bedside chart carried the message, "Do not resuscitate." Tom DeLay, then in his third term in the House of Representatives, reportedly did not object.

Today the congressman is among the loudest voices opposing a court order to remove Terri Schiavo's feeding tube, which placed her at the center of a bitter dispute between her parents, who say their daughter is being starved to death, and her husband, who says she should be allowed to die with dignity.

DeLay pushed a House measure intended to block removal of Schiavo's feeding tube. He not only called the effort to deny her food and water "barbaric," but said she symbolized a larger conspiracy to silence conservative voices.

"One thing that God has brought to us is Terri Schiavo, to help elevate the visibility of what is going on in America," DeLay [told](#) a closed-door audience at a recent Christian Coalition briefing.

"This is exactly the issue that is going on in America, of attacks against the conservative movement, against me and against many others," said DeLay, who lately has come under fire over ethics allegations.

DeLay didn't comment about his own family's decision in 1988, but supporters said the two cases could not be compared.

The only thing keeping Schiavo alive is food and water through a feeding tube, a DeLay spokesman told the *Times*. His father was on a ventilator and other machines to sustain him.

The DeLay family said there was no hope that he would recover. Schiavo's parents disagree with her diagnosis of persistent vegetative state and contend there was still hope she might recover prior to her tube being removed last week.

The conservative Web site [NewsMax.com](#) said the media was mixing "apples with oranges" and called the newspaper report "a new low" in "the media campaign against Rep. Tom DeLay."

After DeLay's father's death, the family filed and settled a wrongful death lawsuit against the distributor and maker of a coupling that they said failed and caused the accident. Today the congressman has taken a leading role in tort reform, pledging to rein in trial lawyers from "frivolous, parasitic lawsuits" that raise insurance rates and hurt business.

While people on both sides criticized efforts to politicize Schiavo's plight, the debate spilled over beyond end-of-life concerns.

“I find myself wondering, why is there so much focus on this life, when we ignore the countless lives throughout the world who die, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, from hunger and disease that this Congress could address and this Congress could prevent,” [said](#) U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays, one of five Republicans to oppose legislation to allow a federal court to intervene in the Schiavo case.

Civil-rights activist Jesse Jackson said in [a column](#) he had misgivings about Congress intervening in the case, but he believed Schiavo’s feeding tube should be reinserted.

“Removing the feeding tube would essentially starve her to death,” he wrote. Jackson said he respected the views of citizens and members of Congress “who passionately cry out against her starvation and seek means to extend her life.”

But he added that a “consistent moral and ethical position would extend a feeding tube to ALL who are confronted with starvation—to demand public, government policy to feed the hungry.”

“I implore them to apply this same passion for Terri Schiavo to the young infants and children dying of starvation and lacking prenatal and post-natal care,” Jackson said. “Those on food stamps need a feeding tube to fend off poverty and starvation. Our homeless population needs a feeding tube to extend their lives and survive.”

“This same passion to halt starvation should also extend to the millions in the Congo and Sudan,” Jackson continued. “With the focus and attention on this one individual case, we must marshal this sentiment and extend a feeding tube to all those in the United States and around the world.”

A column in the [Jamaica Observer](#) noted that “President Bush did not ‘err on the side of life’ when he consigned the born-again, fully conscious Karla Fay Tucker to lethal injection.”

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Worker's World used the Schiavo debate to make a point about the 2-year-old war in Iraq. "At least 100,000 people have died and more are dying every day," said the group's [Web site](#).

"Malnutrition is a fact of life in the deaths of millions of children every year," the article continued. "A small percentage of the resources the U.S. government spends on the military could end hunger in the world.

"Does Bush think that his professed concern over replacing this unfortunate woman's feeding tube will make the world forget his role in perpetuating the hunger of millions?"

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