

A tragic situation can do some good

The issue is one sure to polarize nearly everyone: how to define the thin thread between life and death.

The case is a Miami baby born last Saturday with a rare condition known as anencephaly, in which part of the skull is missing and the brain is merely a stub on the end of the spinal cord. In simple terms, Theresa Ann Pearson had no cognizant thoughts before she died Monday afternoon.

Anencephaly is fatal; most born with the syndrome live but a few seconds. That Baby Theresa lasted nine days is nothing short of a miracle.

Her life started a controversy, forcing doctors, nurses and other medical personnel to question their ethics. Her parents, saying their child would not have a life of her own, wished to donate her organs in the hopes that something might be gained from the tragedy.

The problem came from a 1988 Florida law, which prevents doctors from declaring a patient dead until all brain activity ceases. The reasons for this law is obvious. By setting a sharp legal definition for death, it prevents doctors (and families) from making determinations on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, any possible, tragic mistakes are avoided.

However, this is not a perfect world, and sharp legal definitions are often wanting. Baby Theresa had brain activity. Her brain stem controlled her heartbeat and respiration. Technically, by Florida law, she was alive.

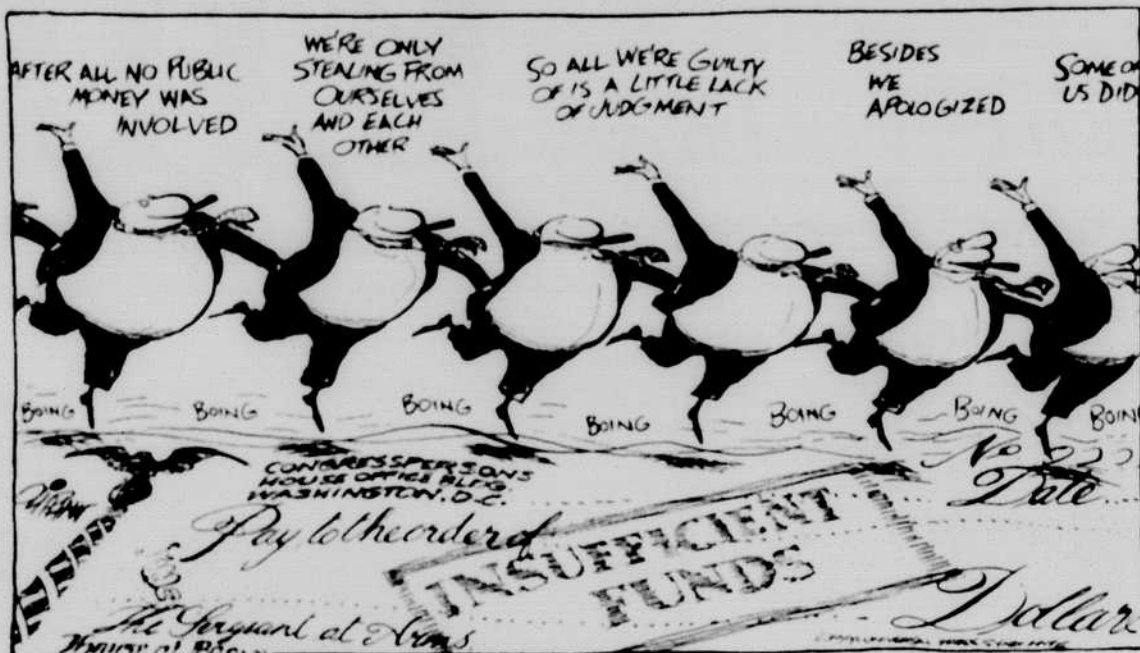
But was it much of a life?

Baby Theresa's parents wished to do some good. The courts and a draconic law wasted her short life. Because the Florida Supreme Court refused to hear the case on an emergency ruling, everything about Baby Theresa is a straight loss. Any gains, any possible chance to alleviate some of the sadness is gone.

This is not meant to question the people's ethics. Those who opposed using Theresa Parson's organs brought up a good point. In effect, by killing Baby Theresa for her organs, a dangerous precedent would be set. Once the legal line was crossed, the next step — toward doing the same thing to a less afflicted child — would be easier.

The only real criticism is directed at the Florida court system, which stalled, hemmed and hawed long enough to make any decision on the case meaningless. Disappointing is a good description; gutless is even better.

There is still something which can be done. The focus Baby Theresa's plight received might force Florida, as well as other states, to rethink their laws. Anencephalic infants clearly are alive in only a technical sense. They have no possibility of recovery or of leading any type of life. If by using their organs others might live, their short lives would not be so tragic.



A CHORUS LINE.

OPINION

Presidency: a \$100 million price tag



THE FINE PRINT

BY DON PETERS

Theme music begins. Swirling mists part to show four men. The announcer, holding a cigarette, stands off to one side.

"You see before you four candidates for president," the announcer says in a monotone. "The problem is, nobody wants them. The era of great American statesmen is over. The voting public is just about to enter ... The Twilight Zone."

OK, so maybe that was a little corny, but just when you think things can't get any more weird in a presidential race, the political gods throw you one that knocks you on your keister.

Paul Tsongas says no more, Jerry Brown shocks Bill Clinton in Connecticut, and Pat Buchanan goes from pit bull to chihuahua.

As amazing as that all is, it pales in comparison with the recent announcement by Texas gazillionaire H. Ross Perot that he is throwing his chapeau into the presidential ring.

Like the saying goes, ya gotta be kidding me.

Perot is hoping he'll get the "none of the above" voters to cast their ballots for him. And it's true, the population is generally disgusted with the current choice of candidates. Clinton's slick style of politics seems better suited for white linen suits and plantations. Brown is fun to watch, but his flat tax idea is just plain frightening. Bush is, well ... Bush.

And now we have Perot, whose biggest qualification for president seems to be the fact that he's willing to spend \$100 million to finance a campaign. Brown's message of refusing political action committee money has been one-upped — where the former California governor won't accept PAC funds, Perot doesn't need them.

For the first time in years, a presidential candidate can honestly say they are completely free of outside financial persuasion.

Independents are always long shots in a political race. Rarely do they poll a substantial amount of the vote, let alone in-

fluence the outcome. The last independent to run — John Anderson in 1980 — got 5.7 million votes, but even if he had stayed home, it wouldn't have prevented Jimmy Carter from going to a crushing defeat.

George Wallace in '68 got 46 electoral votes and about 12 percent of the popular vote. J. Strom Thurmond in 1948, running a similar campaign to Wallace, got 39 electoral votes.

Neither candidate was anywhere close to winning. No independent candidate for president has ever really been in the running for the White House, which doesn't speak well for Perot's chances.

Or does it? It's hard to imagine a more ripe setting for history to be made. Clinton has been pinned with scandal after scandal. Taken separately, they aren't particularly damaging, but collectively, they've been killers. In a recent New York poll, 57 percent said they questioned Clinton's integrity. Suddenly, the Comeback Kid has image problems.

Brown isn't helping either. Winning Connecticut gave his campaign new life. While odds of him winning the nomination are slim, if he continues to sap away Clinton's votes, come convention time the Arkansas governor might have a lot of trouble consolidating party ranks for the general election.

The incumbent, who had an unbelievable approval rating just 12 months ago, is now trailing most small domestic pets in popularity polls. "Bush's economic plan" has become a contradiction in terms. If there was a president ever in danger of losing his reelection bid, it is George Bush.

Three regular-party candidates, all of whom have serious problems. Which brings us back to Perot.

Money can buy a presidency. Anybody with enough chips can sit down at the table and deal themselves in. Perot, by virtue of his \$100 million slush fund, has turned himself into a viable candidate.

This is by no means an endorsement of Perot. He is totally unproven as a candidate and it remains to be seen if he is made of presidential stuff. While his money might scare some people into thinking Perot is a rich man trying to buy his way into the Oval Office, there is something more to his candidacy. His simply being there is an indictment of our political system.

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He probably won't even be close, but perhaps the best thing that could happen to the United States would be a Perot victory. Then people might see how money-corrupted presidential politics has become.

Perot is a wake-up call. Let's hope we don't miss the alarm.

Don Peters is an editorial editor for the Emerald.

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Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.

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