

# Feds to Target Doctors in Assisted Suicide

## Attorney General reverses policy on Death with Dignity Act

(AP) - Attorney General John Ashcroft gave federal drug agents the go-ahead Tuesday to take action against doctors who help terminally ill patients die, a move aimed at undercutting Oregon's unique assisted-suicide law.

The decision, outlined in a letter to Drug Enforcement Administration chief Asa Hutchinson, would allow the revocation of drug licenses of doctors who participate in an assisted suicide using a federally controlled substance.

Ashcroft's letter reverses a June 1998 order by his predecessor, Janet Reno, who barred agents from moving against doctors who used Oregon's law.

Ashcroft said assisted suicide is not a "legitimate medical purpose" for prescribing, dispensing or administering federally controlled substances. However, he said pain management is a legitimate medical use of controlled substances.

Ashcroft based his decision on a unanimous Supreme Court ruling in May that said there is no exception in federal drug laws for the medical use of marijuana to ease pain from cancer, AIDS and other illnesses.

The court didn't change state laws allowing patients to use marijuana for medical reasons, but made the drug harder to obtain by denying patients the

right to claim "medical necessity" as a reason to circumvent a 1970 law regulating controlled substances.

Under Oregon's Death With Dignity Act, doctors may provide - but not administer - a lethal prescription to terminally ill adult state residents. It requires that two doctors agree the patient has less than six months to live, has voluntarily chosen to die and is able to make health care decisions.

At least 70 terminally ill people have ended their lives since the law took effect in 1997, according to the Oregon Health Division. All have done so with a federally controlled substance such as a barbiturate.

## Kitzhaber Appalled by Ashcroft Decision

Gov. John Kitzhaber predicted that few physicians, if any, would be willing to risk prosecution after U.S.

Attorney General John Ashcroft gave federal drug agents the go-ahead to take action against doctors who help terminally ill patients die.

"If I was practicing medicine today, I would be very concerned about the implications of being exposed to criminal prosecution" for prescribing life-ending drugs to the terminally ill, Kitzhaber said.

Kitzhaber, a Democrat, blasted Ashcroft's decision to move against

Oregon's assisted-suicide law when the country is preoccupied with a terrorism scare.

"Given everything that the country is going through right now, with the country trying to respond to anthrax, why John Ashcroft picked this moment to inject this divisive issue into the public debate is just beyond me," the governor said.

The state will file motions in U.S. District Court in Portland on Wednesday seeking to head off Ashcroft's order, said Kevin Neely, spokesman for the Oregon attorney general's office.

## Widespread Job Losses Reported

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Widespread job losses catapulted the unemployment rate from 4.9 percent in September to 5.4 percent last month, marking the highest unemployment rate the country has seen since December 1996, the Labor Department reported Friday.

The 415,000 jobs eliminated during the month represented the biggest cut in payrolls since May 1980. Manufacturing, airlines, travel agencies, hotels, retailers were among those posting big losses.

The 0.5 percentage-point advance in October's unemployment rate also was the biggest one-month gain since May 1980.

Economists fear that continued fallout from the attacks, new worries about anthrax in the mail, plunging consumer confidence and rising unemployment in the months ahead, will keep consumers tightfisted, further weakening the economy.

## Artificial Heart Patient May Soon Leave Hospital

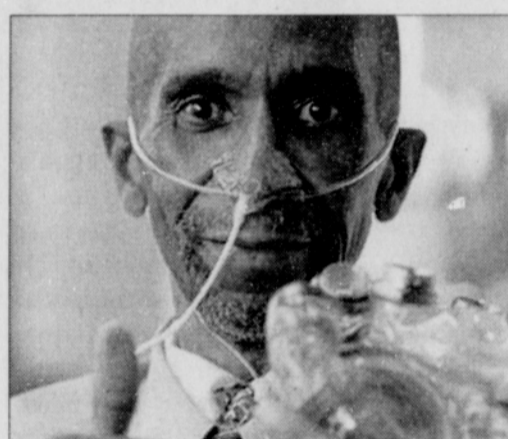
(AP) — The world's first recipient of a self-contained artificial heart may get his wish to leave the hospital and be home for the holidays if he bulks up in the next few weeks, his doctor says.

Robert Tools has been gaining strength in the nearly four months since the titanium-and-plastic pump was implanted in his chest at Jewish Hospital, but he still needs to put on some weight, Dr. Robert Dowling said last week.

"If we could get about 30 pounds of muscle mass on him, he could be out of the hospital in three weeks," Dowling said.

Tools, 59, of Franklin, Ky., wants to spend Thanksgiving at home, but that may be a bit soon, Dowling said.

"My guess is, he's probably going to be out having Thanksgiving dinner somewhere other than the hospi-



Robert Tools is the world's first recipient of a self-contained artificial heart.

tal," Dowling said. "But if we can get him home for the Christmas holiday, that would be wonderful. Is it a possibility? Yes. Is it a likelihood? I can't speculate."

Tools was given little chance of living 30 days before he received the AbioCor device. Since then, Tools' artificial heart has beat millions of times, and he takes strolls in the park, dines out at restaurants and has gone fishing, Dowling said. During one round of therapy, Tools

lifted 50 pounds - about a third of his own weight.

Tools was about 140 pounds at the time of surgery and has since gained 10 pounds, the doctor said. He weighed more than 200 pounds before he fell ill.

The Food and Drug Administration must approve any discharge plan for Tools.

Since he received the AbioCor on July 2, three other patients have been implanted with the softball-sized device.

## Gospel Mission Plans Thanksgiving

Union Gospel Mission is planning to serve over 600 meals on Thanksgiving to Portland's homeless and needy.

The meal, consisting of a tradition menu of turkey, potatoes, dinner rolls, salad and pie, will take place on Nov. 22nd from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

To enhance this year's meal, Union Gospel Mission is calling the Thanksgiving festivities "Love your neighbor day" and will serve the meal with live music under a huge tent, donated for use by Northwest Natural Gas.

The tent will block off NW Third between NW Burnside and NW Couch in front of Union

Gospel Mission during the Thanksgiving meal.

Last year, the charity served 648 meals in the mission's dining room in shifts. The tent will enable the service of many more people all at once.

Union Gospel Mission is seeking donations of food or monetary donations to support the Thanksgiving meal.

Donations may be made at Union Gospel Mission at 15 N.W. Third Ave. Monetary donations can be mailed to the Union Gospel Mission's Administrative office at 222 N.W. Couch, Portland OR 97209 or donated online at [www.ugmportland.com](http://www.ugmportland.com) or call this mission at 503-274-4483.

## Pioneer Courthouse Upgrade Approved

The U.S. House of Representatives has passed the final version of the Treasury Postal Appropriations bill, which included \$16 million for seismic retrofitting and upgrading of the Pioneer Courthouse building in downtown Portland.

Congressman Blumenauer led the delegation effort to ask the Administration and Congress to provide this critical

funding.

Sen. Gordon Smith, who helped pass the funding in the Senate, said, "The historic Pioneer Courthouse is physically and symbolically the heart of Portland's commercial and cultural district. These funds ensure that Pioneer Courthouse will remain a landmark that future generations of Portlanders will cherish."

## Jobless May Get Extended Benefit

(AP) - If Oregon's unemployment rate takes another dive, the state's jobless could qualify for extended benefits for the first time in a decade.

The program, which would add another 13 weeks to the 26 weeks of unemployment benefits Oregon's unemployed currently receive, automatically kicks in when a three-month moving average of a state's unemployment rate equals or exceeds 6.5 percent.

Oregon's unemployment rate of 6.4 in September is well above the national rate. State economists already have announced that Oregon is in a recession, having recorded three consecutive quarters of employment declines.

Only three states have rates higher than 6 percent, based on September surveys: Oregon at 6.4 percent, Washington at 6.1 percent and Alaska at 6.5 percent.

State employment economists say they won't know for sure whether Oregon qualifies for extended benefits until the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics takes

the state's October unemployment rate, plugs it into a complex mix of factors and computes the average.

The bureau will release its findings Nov. 20.

Frank Richey, who manages Oregon's unemployment insurance programs, cautioned against trying to guess what the analysis will show. But an October unemployment rate above 6.7 percent likely would trigger the program, he said.

The U.S. economy has yet to officially slide into recession, although Wednesday's report that the total output of goods and services slipped into the red in the third quarter is a strong indication the condition is imminent.

As for Oregon's October job numbers, state economist Tom Potiowsky expects manufacturing to take the biggest hit in Oregon, as it did nationally.

"You're going to see the manufacturing downturn reflected in the Oregon report when it comes out," Potiowsky said.

## The Death Penalty, A Congregational Issue

Across the country, states are revisiting the death penalty issue. Congregations are asking, How can we get involved?

The First United Methodist Church, located at 1838 S.W. Jefferson will be holding a conference on Friday, Nov. 16 called "Justice, the Death Penalty and the Congregation."

Guest speakers will be Sister Helen Prejean, author of the award winning book "Dead Man Walking" and William Long, the author of "A Tortured History: The Story of Capital Punishment in Oregon."

The conference is open to all of those interested in the topic and will provide valuable tools and resources for congregations.

For more information or to make reservations, call 503-296-6761 or send an email to [portland@ajc.org](mailto:portland@ajc.org).

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