

California moves toward forced sterilization

by Kathleen Klenetsky

The state of California, under the direction of Republican Gov. Pete Wilson, a booster of President George Bush, will start foisting the long-term contraceptive Norplant on female welfare recipients. The announcement was made in late February by the state health administration.

From now on, the estimated 1.3 million women receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children benefits will have Norplant available to them free. On the open market, Norplant is quite expensive, with the average implant costing \$700.

Despite the fact that California is slashing welfare benefits otherwise, as well as a host of other social programs, the Wilson administration believes that it is "cost effective" to spend money to prevent welfare recipients from having more "undesirable" children. The new state budget includes a \$5 million allocation for Norplant alone.

State health officials claim they are motivated solely by concern that poor women be given the same access to contraception as their better-off counterparts. But to buy that line, you would have to have been born yesterday.

Welfare rolls grow as economy collapses

The truth of the matter is that the Wilson administration, like an expanding circle of politicians across the country, has decided to sacrifice welfare recipients on the altar of political expediency. California is in the midst of an economic collapse that has intensified dramatically over the past year. Cutbacks in the U.S. defense budget have hit the state hard, while the bottom has fallen out of California's wild real-estate boom.

These factors, combined with the general depression in the rest of the country, have not only created a \$10 billion state budget deficit, but led to massive layoffs and unemployment. Not surprisingly, California's welfare rolls have mushroomed in the last two years, as more and more of the recently unemployed run out of unemployment benefits and job prospects. Over the last two years, the welfare rolls have doubled, rising from 1.5 million in August 1989 to 2.2 million in June 1991.

But rather than break with the bankrupt economic poli-

cies of the Bush administration, Wilson and other state officials have opted to scapegoat the poor, and especially the easy target of welfare mothers.

This past December, Wilson unveiled a statewide referendum called the "Taxpayer Protection Act of 1992," which proposed a total 25% cut in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program—a 10% cut immediately, followed by another 15% cut after six months. The initiative also proposed banning any additional payments to any woman who bears a child while receiving welfare benefits; a similar law has already been adopted in New Jersey.

Wilson's Norplant proposal takes the same genocidal impulse one step further.

Welfare rights advocates fear that the supposedly "voluntary" Norplant program will quickly become mandatory. In the recent past, Wilson has voiced interest in various techniques to keep women on welfare from reproducing, and has expressed particular enthusiasm about Norplant, which is implanted under the skin and keeps the recipient sterile for five years, or until it is surgically removed.

Policy an 'abomination'

Kevin Aslanian, executive director of the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, told *EIR* that "the biggest fear we have is that Wilson will end up forcing women to do this," i.e., accept Norplant, by threatening them with loss of benefits should they fail to comply.

"We fear the governor is trying to manipulate people into being sterilized," Aslanian said, adding, "We wouldn't be at all surprised if the Bush administration were pushing this" behind the scenes.

"Wilson knows the budget problem is not caused by welfare," Aslanian charged. State spending on AFDC totals only 5% of the state budget, and even if all AFDC benefits were terminated, the state would still have a huge budget deficit.

Another coalition official, Grace Gallagher, told reporters recently that she had heard rumors from Wilson's office six months ago "that they were toying with the idea of making Norplant mandatory for any woman who applies for AFDC as a condition of eligibility." She added: "I just don't trust Pete Wilson" to keep the program on a voluntary basis.

Although the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles has yet to issue a statement condemning Wilson's policy, maintaining that the Catholic Church's ban on artificial contraception would naturally extend to the use of Norplant, right-to-life networks are up in arms.

"I think it is an abomination, and a short-sighted cure for a long-term problem," one activist told *EIR*. "Norplant is simply a license for promiscuity and an open door to AIDS and all sorts of venereal disease." The right-to-lifer characterized the policy as having a "eugenics flavor" reminiscent of birth-control pioneer Margaret Sanger's advocacy of contraception for the "racially unfit" and the poor.