

Death stalks California; will your family be next?

by Brian Lantz

On Nov. 3, in the midst of a state budget crisis and skyrocketing bankruptcies and unemployment, California voters will consider Proposition 161, a ballot initiative which would legalize physician-assisted murder of terminally ill patients. In tandem with another ballot initiative, Proposition 165, which would mandate brutal 25% cuts in public assistance, Proposition 161 is aimed directly at the constitutional mandate of "the inalienable right to life."

California ballot initiatives 161 and 165 are a paradigm of the cold-blooded direction being given to health care and public assistance "reform" across the nation. Unless the U.S. economy is quickly turned right-side-up, the writing is certainly on the wall for everyone to see. Virtually every state in the union is suffering a major budget crisis. New Jersey and Wisconsin have similar initiatives which would institute draconian cuts in already inadequate public assistance to poor families, the physically and mentally handicapped, and the elderly. A consensus has been reached among the presidential candidates, with the exception of the LaRouche-Bevel independent ticket. Bill Clinton and the Democratic Party now call for "ending welfare as we know it." Clinton argues that "controlling health care costs" is the key to a U.S. economic recovery. Ross Perot demands \$200 billion in cuts in Medicare and Social Security payments. All propose that putting welfare recipients to work will solve some part of the problem. As total unemployment and underemployment stand at over 22 million Americans, one must ask, "where?" Twelve years of Reagan and Bush have given us a crisis which has, in terms of the homeless, literally spilled over into the streets.

Nazi euthanasia

Proposition 161 is officially titled, "Physician-Assisted Death. Terminal Condition. Initiative Statute." Whether it

passes or not, it epitomizes the low point to which the value of human life has been brought. The number of California children living in extreme poverty has increased 50% in the last decade.

According to the Washington, D.C.-based Food Research and Action Center, some 13% of California's children go to bed hungry every night. Another 15% are "at risk," a total of almost one-third when combined. The state's program for the mentally ill last year was rated behind those of Alabama, South Carolina, and the District of Columbia, and "moving backward."

Proposition 161 would authorize any mentally competent person, diagnosed as terminally ill and at least 18 years of age, to request "aid in dying." Physicians are authorized, "if properly requested," to terminate a life in a "painless, humane and dignified manner," or provide the means so that a patient can "self-administer," i.e., kill himself. Initiative supporters contend that "the quality of life" is more important than life itself. They argue that the measure is written so as to protect health professionals and facilities from civil, criminal, and administrative liability for murder. Amazingly, the initiative declares that assisted death is "not suicide."

In an unprecedented action, the Catholic Bishops of California have intervened by sending a formal letter to all 1,070 parishes in the state. The letter, read to all services, asks the faithful to "to enter actively into the debate." The bishops ask that individuals consider personal contributions to defeat Proposition 161. The bishops' letter of July 29 reads in part: "We prefer that moral issues be settled in the hearts of men and women. However, the issue allowing doctors actively to take the lives of people has pushed into the public policy arena by proponents of the initiative, and this must be debated. Legislation may be passed which not only contradicts traditional Catholic morality, but also

attacks the principles underlying our system of government and threatens the lives of the poor and powerless in our state.”

Proposition 165

In the third week of August, demonstrations occurred in the state capital of Sacramento, as well as San Francisco and Los Angeles. In San Francisco, wheelchair-bound citizens chained themselves to the doors of a state building. Was this another San Francisco left-wing cause, as pooh-pooed by President Bush in May? Two weeks before, the state had cut payment to 155,000 *minimum wage* workers providing home care to 171,541 disabled Californians. “People are being left in life-threatening situations. People are ending up spending nights and days lying in their own excrement because there is no one there to help them,” charged Stan Greenberg, executive director of a Los Angeles self-help center, in the Aug. 26 *Los Angeles Times*. On Aug. 25, a San Francisco judge ordered state officials to resume payments. Gov. Pete Wilson’s office is immediately appealing the ruling!

An irony is that these the disputed payments to home care workers, averaging less than \$25 a day, save that state the cost of convalescent home care which would cost \$200 a day. Governor Wilson, however, a close supporter of George Bush, has bigger game in mind.

Since July 1, the California budget crisis, a projected two-year, \$10 million-plus deficit, has grabbed national headlines as the state government has turned to paying its bills in scrip—over \$3 billion worth to date. California’s major banks stopped honoring that scrip in early August, unwilling, they said, to finance the paralysis in Sacramento which was preventing agreement on a draconian budget. On Aug. 11 the State Comptroller announced that the state would hold up Medicare (MediCal) payments, even in the form of IOUs, to doctors, hospitals, nursing homes, and other health care providers until a new state budget agreement was reached. Wilson stated that he will do nothing to soften the pain caused by the budget crisis, as to do so would only prolong it.

Wilson is demagogically demanding, both through the permutations of his two-year budget proposal and his ballot initiative, Proposition 165, that welfare checks be slashed by 25%, and MediCal be cut over \$1 billion. He is trying to figure out how he can get away with cutting \$1-2 billion out of the education budget. Proposition 165 would *deny benefits to children conceived after their mother goes on welfare*, adopting a feature of the genocidal one-child-per-family policy of communist China. If a mother is not defined as permanently disabled by the state, her family’s check will be cut by 25%, unless she finds a job. If she finds a part-time job, her check will be cut by “only” 10%. As jobs are scarce, and dependable child care practically unavailable, most mothers would be forced to accept a 25% cut. Wilson is selling his proposal—very similar to “Slick Willie” Clinton’s—as creating incentives. The cruel reality is that Cali-

fornia public assistance now pays a mother and two children maximum total benefits of \$850 a month. A one-bedroom apartment consumes two-thirds of that money in urban areas. With Wilson’s 25% cut in public assistance, many more families will have to choose between living on the street or starving.

Evading the moral issue

Without a reversal of the economic crisis which determines the state budget crisis, the only question is whether “the right to die” will be implemented de jure or de facto. Tuberculosis is now epidemic in California; statewide TB is up 40% and last year was 50% above the national average, as Governor Wilson and the Democratic-controlled legislature prepare a \$1 billion cut in MediCal. California’s workmen’s compensation program pays out less than 45 other states. The AIDS epidemic has been costing the state over \$500 million a year.

Ominously, over 567,000 signatures were gathered to place Proposition 161 on the ballot, and a similar number for Proposition 165. Polls show that the majority of Californians, after years of media brainwashing, favor the idea of physician aid in dying. California already has laws which give patients and their families the right to “pull the plug” on medical treatment. In the early 1980s, only associates of Lyndon LaRouche strongly lobbied against “right to die” legislation as a “crime against humanity,” as defined under the Nuremberg Code under which the Nazis were tried. Now, however, almost every organization representing health care professionals has come out against taking another step down this primrose path. Even the state organization representing hospices—which offer palliatives instead of treatment to the very sick—oppose Proposition 161. In a belabored statement, the California State Hospice Association argues, “Laws are symbols of what society values. Measures such as this can cause us to dehumanize the process of dying and as a consequence, ultimately devalue human life.”

Most opposition, as with the Hospice Association, evades the real moral and economic issues. The California Medical Association stresses the lack of sufficient provisions to protect physicians from criminal and civil complaints. As no witnesses are required to be present at the time of the “request to terminate,” or at the time the person’s life is terminated, the CMA is rightly concerned that doctors could be charged with coercion and cold-blooded murder. Attempting to plant its feet firmly in similar moral quicksand, in a formal statement, the “No on 161” coalition states: “The No on 161 coalition is working to defeat Prop. 161 because of *the initiative’s many flaws and ambiguities*. Whether people have a right to ask for physician-assisted suicide is not at issue in this campaign” (emphasis in the original).

The crisis will not be solved with such sophistry. As a nation, we will either fight for the right to every single, precious life, or we shall surely lose everything.