

Thompson speaks up on right-to-life issues

By Richard Wolf, USA TODAY

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WASHINGTON -- Republican presidential candidate Fred Thompson waded back into end-of-life issues Sunday by saying a comatose, brain-damaged Florida woman who was allowed to die in 2005 should have been kept alive.

Thompson, who was endorsed last week by the National Right to Life Committee, said he would have sided with Terri Schiavo's parents in "keeping that child alive." Schiavo, 41, was allowed to die by court ruling at the request of her husband, but only after a seven-year legal and political battle.

Last month, Thompson said such matters should be left to families to decide. He referred to his own daughter, Elizabeth Panici, who died six days after an accidental drug overdose in 2002. In September, he had said he didn't recall the details of the Schiavo case.

On Sunday, however, he told ABC's This Week that life should be preserved whenever possible, even if state laws need to be overturned. "How can anyone come to the conclusion that there is a benefit of the doubt not to choose life for a loved one?" he said.

Thompson, a former U.S. senator from Tennessee, is seeking a strong showing in the Iowa caucuses Jan. 3. Two of his opponents, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, coveted the Right to Life endorsement.

Huckabee questioned the endorsement on Fox News Sunday, arguing that his record on abortion issues is more pure than Thompson's. "Fred's never had a 100% record on right to life in his Senate career," he said.

Thompson defended his record. "I've had a pro-life voting record my entire career on every conceivable issue that came up before us for almost a decade," he said on ABC.

Wanda Franz, president of the National Right to Life Committee, said the endorsement was based on Thompson's record, positions on issues and electability. On end-of-life care, she said, Thompson told Right to Life officials that "the family's feelings should take precedence over the medical staff."

With 45 days until the caucuses, the Democratic race is heating up as well.

Former North Carolina senator John Edwards said his criticism of Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton should not be characterized as mudslinging, as she said during last week's debate in Las Vegas.

"This is milquetoast compared to what we're going to see next fall," he said on CBS' Face the Nation.