

News

# Schiavo turns rage into TerriPAC

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**W**ASHINGTON -- Michael Schiavo, who fought for years to remove his wife, Terri, from a feeding tube that kept her alive, has turned his anger about Congress's intervention into political action.

Schiavo announced Wednesday that he has opened TerriPAC to strike back at politicians who tried to keep his brain-damaged wife alive through congressional legislation he termed a "sickening exercise in raw political power."

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Throughout the years, Schiavo maintained that his wife would not have wanted to be kept alive artificially after being robbed of her brain function. Her parents, Bob and Mary Schindler, had sought to keep the feeding tube intact and had rallied anti-abortion forces to their side.

The case became a media spectacle, and then a congressional slugfest, when **GOP** leaders brought lawmakers back from Easter recess for an emergency vote on behalf of the Schindlers.

"It is not so simple to forget those politicians who shamelessly sought to squeeze political leverage out of my family's most emotional hour," said Schiavo, a Clearwater nurse who pointed out that he was a Republican before the congregational action.



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Rep. Dave Weldon, R-Indialantic, who proposed the House legislation, said Schiavo's political-action committee struck him as a "political stunt" because it focused on Republicans but not Democrats who voted for the bill. But, he said, he welcomed public attention to the issue.

"It might be good to have some debate on this issue: the right to access to food and water versus the so-called right to die," Weldon said.

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Weston, who led opposition to the congressional measure, said she shared Schiavo's outrage.

"The members that inserted themselves into the Schiavo family matter should have to answer for it," she said.

Conservative activist Ken Connor, who helped lead the drive in Congress, said Schiavo has "proven himself to be the classic opportunist. This represents yet further evidence of that."

Miami Democratic consultant Derek Newton, who is working with Schiavo to set up the PAC -- [www.TerriPAC.org](http://www.TerriPAC.org) -- said the organization is nonpartisan. Its leaders will pick races in which they can make a difference and in which candidates are outspoken in the controversy about life-and-death issues such as Terri Schiavo's.

They hope to use most of the money raised for advertising in about 10 to 12 races nationally and 10 to 12 in Florida.

**Sen. Mel Martinez**, R-Fla., and Weldon introduced the legislation to give Schiavo's parents another legal avenue for keeping her alive. Martinez is not up for re-election this year, and Weldon has not had serious competition in recent elections.

Public polls during the Schiavo controversy in the spring showed strong opposition to the congressional action. But Connor said the real problem was that Congress didn't do enough.

When courts ruled Schiavo's feeding tube could be removed, despite the congressional action, lawmakers failed to act, he said. She died March 31.

"Leadership today is known for finding a parade and getting in front of it," Connor complained.

Newton said he doesn't know how much the PAC will raise. But political observers said it may have more influence on the policy debate than the election results.

Sheila Krumholz of the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics said single-issue PACs can have an impact when they target a limited number of races and pump money into advertising. If they do the

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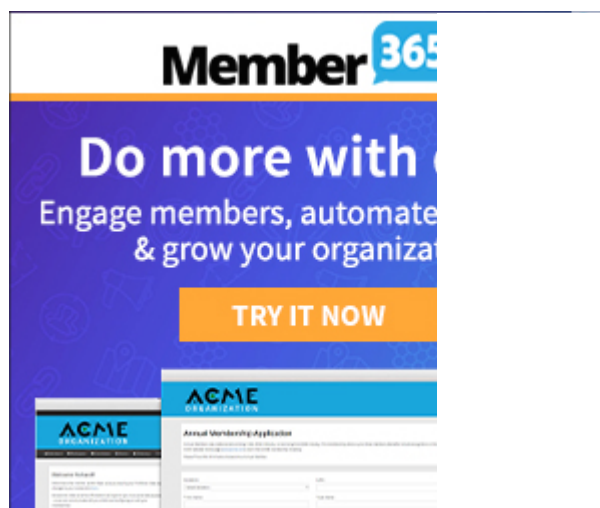
Schiavo lobbied earlier this year in the Virginia governor's race to oppose Republican Jerry Kilgore because of his comments against "forced starvation." Kilgore lost but probably not because of Schiavo's campaigning, said government professor John McGlennon of the College of William and Mary.

McGlennon compared Schiavo's PAC to the anti-handgun efforts of Jim Brady and his family. Brady, the White House press secretary, was seriously injured during the assassination attempt on his boss, President Reagan, in 1981. Like Brady, Schiavo could have an impact by getting candidates to focus on his issue and raising public awareness.

"People who have been involved in such an intensely personal experience that changes their life . . . look for a way to have a lasting impact," McGlennon said.

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