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Backers of Schiavo's parents head to Washington

Schindler spokesman disputes attorney over her condition

Sunday, March 27, 2005 Posted: 9:53 PM EST (0253 GMT)

TALLAHASSEE, Florida (CNN) -- With their court battles apparently exhausted, supporters of Terri Schiavo's parents said Sunday that they would take their efforts to Washington on Monday.

The Rev. Patrick Mahoney, a conservative Christian activist who has become a prominent figure in the protests over Schiavo's case, said he will go to Washington to plead with congressional leaders and the Bush administration to enforce a subpoena issued March 18 by a House committee for the 41-year-old woman to appear before Congress.

The conclusion of Mahoney's news conference Sunday afternoon was disrupted by a minor scuffle among protesters jostling to get their signs within camera range.

After remarks by Randall Terry -- an activist against abortion rights who has been acting as a spokesman for Terri Schiavo's family, the Schindlers -- members of a group calling itself the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigades seized control of the microphones and blasted Terry as a "Christian fascist thug" trying to interfere in "the most intimate affairs of life and death."

"[Terri Schiavo's] brain is not functional. It's not going to recover. Let her die in peace," pleaded



Demonstrators on both sides of the debate shout and hold signs outside the hospice Sunday.

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Sunsari Taylor, a member of the group.

Before the disruption, Mahoney had said: "We are going to plead for Terri, to be her voice in Washington, D.C."

The congressional subpoena was quashed the same day it was issued by the Florida judge who ordered Schiavo's feeding tube removed, and the U.S. Supreme Court rejected an appeal of that decision by Republican congressional leaders.

Mahoney said the fact that Schiavo has survived nearly 10 days since the removal of the tube that has supplied her with nutrition and water indicates that she wants to appear before the House Government Reform Committee.

He challenged House Speaker Dennis Hastert, an Illinois Republican, to show that he was not "just playing politics" with the subpoena.

With tensions flaring, security outside Schiavo's hospice in Pinellas Park, Florida, was doubled Sunday from the day before to as many as 10 police officers.

Protesters have gathered daily outside the hospice, and some have been arrested trying to enter the facility in ceremonial efforts to take water to Terri Schiavo.

Despite the Schindlers' requests that people spend Easter at home with their families, demonstrators showed up outside the hospice Sunday. Their son, Bobby Schindler, asked protesters to stop volunteering to be arrested.

"It's not going to help at all to do anything that's going to lead to arrests," Schindler said. Police "are here to do a job," he added.

Spokesmen disagree

The feeding tube that has been Schiavo's sole source of sustenance since 1990 was removed after a lengthy legal battle between her husband, Michael, and her parents.

Michael Schiavo says his wife would not want to be kept alive in her current state, and a succession of court rulings has supported him.

Attorneys for Michael Schiavo had no word on her condition Sunday.

But an attorney for Schiavo's parents said the woman who doctors have said is in a persistent vegetative state was "past the point of no return."

"Terri is declining rapidly. We believe she has, at this point, passed where physically she would be able to recover," David Gibbs, the Schindler family's lawyer, said on CBS' "Face the Nation."

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But a few hours later, Terry rejected those remarks. He said Gibbs represents the Schindler family "in matters of court, but he did not represent them this morning when he gave that report about Terri."

Schiavo received Holy Communion on Sunday afternoon, said Monsignor Thaddeus Malanowski, who administered the rite along with the chaplain of the hospice where Schiavo lay.

"I gave her the drop of precious blood on the tongue, so we know she received Christ," Malanowski said. He said he was unable to give Schiavo the traditional host wafer "because her tongue is dry and parched."

Doctors have said she has been unable to swallow food since February 1990, when she collapsed in her home, suffering from cardiac arrest related to an eating disorder.

Schiavo suffered severe brain damage before paramedics were able to restart her heart. Michael Schiavo said his wife suffered from bulimia, an eating disorder that resulted in a potassium deficiency that triggered her heart failure.

Gibbs also said Terri Schiavo is receiving morphine for pain.

The American Academy of Neurology issued a position statement in 1988 on the persistent vegetative state, declaring that such patients "do not have the capacity to experience pain or suffering."

On Saturday, Bobby Schindler said Terri Schiavo was "not dying peacefully and painlessly."

But George Felos, an attorney for Michael Schiavo, visited her Saturday and said she was "calm," "peaceful" and "resting comfortably."

Governor Bush says he can't help

Earlier Sunday, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush said there is nothing he can do to save Terri Schiavo's life.

"I cannot violate a court order," Bush said after attending Easter Sunday church services. "I don't have powers from the United States Constitution -- or for that matter from the Florida Constitution -- that would allow me to intervene after a decision has been made.

"I'm sad that she's in the situation that she's in," Bush said, commenting publicly on the case for the first time since Thursday. "I feel bad for her family. My heart goes out to the Schindlers and, for that matter, to [her husband] Michael [Schiavo]," Bush said. "This has not been an easy thing for any, any member of the family. But most particularly for Terri Schiavo."

To Terri Schiavo's parents -- who have said Bush should do more to help their daughter -- the governor said: "I can't. I'd love to, but I can't."

Her parents have lost nearly 30 legal opinions in both state and federal courts, which have consistently sided with Michael Schiavo, who also is Terri Schiavo's legal guardian.

CNN's Ed Henry contributed to this report.

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