

Schiavo case doesn't end with death

*Fight over burial possible
nation looks at living wills
[FINAL Edition]*

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PINELLAS PARK, Fla. -- Terri Schiavo, the brain-damaged woman at the center of a bitter legal battle that prompted extraordinary action from Congress and the White House and focused national attention on end-of-life issues, died Thursday.

She was 41. Her death came 13 days after a feeding tube that kept her alive for 15 years was removed. Schiavo's final two weeks involved multiple court appeals. Over the years, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to intervene in the case six times, most recently Wednesday. Hundreds of protesters camped outside the hospice here where she was a patient.

By the time she died at 9:05 a.m. ET, the case had become an international story. The van transporting her body to the Pinellas County medical examiner's office was shown live on TV. An autopsy will be performed.

Even the Vatican got involved. Shortly after her death, Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, head of the Vatican's office for sainthood, called the removal of the feeding tube "an attack against God."

President Bush said Thursday, "The essence of civilization is that the strong have a duty to protect the weak." His brother, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, who pushed hard to intervene, said, "Her experience will heighten awareness of the importance of families dealing with end-of-life issues, and this is an incredible legacy."

The case spurred public interest in living wills, which allow people to spell out whether they want to be kept alive by artificial medical means. "No question that people's awareness across the country, if not the world, has been raised by this case," said **Howard Krooks**, a lawyer in White Plains, N.Y.

First lady Laura Bush this week told reporters that she and the president have living wills, as do their parents. "I think that is important for families to have opportunities to talk about these issues," she said.

Schiavo had no living will. Her husband and parents fought in court over what she would have wanted after she suffered brain damage in 1990 when a chemical imbalance caused her heart to stop. Florida courts ruled she was in a persistent vegetative state.

The family dispute could continue. Her husband, Michael, has court permission to have his wife cremated and to inter her ashes in Pennsylvania, where the couple grew up. Her parents want her buried in Florida.

In the end, "the case of a married woman in a persistent vegetative state is not something that hasn't come up before," said William Allen, a bioethicist at the University of Florida medical school.

***Parker reported from McLean, Va. Contributing: Richard Willing

[Illustration] PHOTO, Color, Roberto Schmidt, AFP/Getty Images; PHOTO, Color, Undated family photo;

Caption: At hospice: Terri Schiavo's sister Suzanne Vitadamo, father Bob Schindler and brother Bobby Schindler.