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## The Terri Schiavo Case

# Regret plagues King after Schiavo vote

**The Senate president says he bowed to pressure to pass a law that would reinsert Terri Schiavo's feeding tube.**

By ADAM C. SMITH, Times Political Editor  
Published February 10, 2004

ST. PETERSBURG - The phone calls and e-mails flooded into state Senate offices so fast and furious last year they crashed the phone and computer systems. Their message: Save Terri Schiavo.



King

State senators responded by following the lead of the state House and governor to pass an unprecedented law to keep the Pinellas County woman alive. Within hours a feeding tube was reinserted into Schiavo, whom courts had found to be in a persistent vegetative state and whose husband had insisted she would not want to live that way.

Senate President Jim King gave in to pressure and supported the legislation. Now he's sorry he did.

"The Terri Schiavo vote that I made was probably one of the worst votes that I've ever done," said the Jacksonville Republican and 18-year veteran of the Legislature.

In a meeting Monday with the St. Petersburg Times editorial board, King spoke of the "unbelievable" pressure to help Schiavo, his worries about being blamed for Schiavo's death and his regret that he didn't show more backbone.

After five years of bitter litigation over the wishes and fate of Schiavo, who had no living will, her feeding tube was removed Oct. 15. A massive campaign by religious conservatives across the country pressured lawmakers and Gov. Jeb Bush to step in and save her. The Legislature passed a hastily crafted law on Oct. 21, and her feeding tube was reinserted that evening. A legal challenge is pending.

King said other senators who voted for the Schiavo law have told him

In 36 states, including Florida, he could be fired just because he's gay.

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they also regret it, but the pressure of tens of thousands of phone calls and e-mails - and physical and political threats - was enormous.

"After the vote there were far more people critical of what we had done and very vehemently angry at what we had done than there were people supporting it," King said.

A Times poll in December found two-thirds of Florida voters opposed the Schiavo law.

There is "no question" he would not vote that way today, King said, "and if it comes up again I will not do it."

King said he won't try to repeal the law because he expects it will be overturned in court. But he made it clear, as he has in recent weeks, that he will block any bills aimed at making it harder to remove feeding tubes from comatose or mentally incompetent patients without living wills.

Bill Stephens, executive director of the Christian Coalition of Florida, one of the groups that fought for the Schiavo law, said he is "shocked" that King regrets his vote.

"It sounds like we're going to have a challenge this year," Stephens said.

King is a leader among moderate Republicans in Florida, and he has butted heads with Christian conservatives before.

One of his proudest and most hard-fought achievements was passing a "death with dignity law" that gives Floridians the right to refuse life-prolonging medical care.

King said he is wary of any bills inspired by Schiavo's case that could weaken those rights, which he pushed for after watching his parents die in nursing homes.

Underscoring his moderate views on social issues, King acknowledged Monday he disagrees with a Florida law that bars gay couples from adopting kids. The state allows homosexuals to serve as legal guardians and foster parents, but a law recently upheld by a federal appeals court does not allow them to adopt.

"They're doing everything else but adopting, and in many cases ... it is the adoptable child that really isn't being adopted by anyone else," King said in response to a question. "Empirical evidence is that gays that have been involved in foster parenting have better performance factors than a lot of the 'normal' foster parents."

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