February 17, 2016

SCALIA’S DEATH MEANS LOSS OF KEY VOTE IN DIVIDED CASES

Justice Antonin Scalia’s death deprives conservatives of a key vote that could change the outcome in some major Supreme Court cases, including one in which labor unions appeared headed for a big defeat.

Next month’s Supreme Court arguments in a clash over contraceptives, religious liberty and President Barack Obama’s health care law also now seem more likely to favor the Obama administration.

Those are the most immediate effects on the court of the loss of its conservative icon and longest-serving justice.

It’s a firm Supreme Court rule that decisions are not final until they are handed down. So nothing Scalia did or said in pending cases matters to the outcome.

“The vote of a deceased justice does not count,” veteran Supreme Court lawyer Roy Englert said Sunday, a day after Scalia was found dead in his room at a west Texas ranch.

Subtracting Scalia’s vote from cases in which he was in the majority in a 5-4 split leaves the result tied, four a side.

The remaining eight justices have two options in that situation: They can vote to hear the case a second time when a new colleague joins them or they can hand down a one-sentence opinion that upholds the result reached in the lower court without setting a nationwide rule.

A second round of arguments seems less likely at the moment because a new justice may not be confirmed until the next president is in office.

A tie vote, by contrast, resolves the case at hand and allows the legal issue to return to the court at a later date when there is a ninth justice.

Public sector labor unions had been bracing for a stinging defeat in a lawsuit over whether they can collect fees from government workers who choose not to join the union. The case affects more than 5 million workers in 23 states and Washington, D.C., and seeks to overturn a nearly 40-year-old Supreme Court decision.

Now, what seemed like a certain 5-4 split, with the conservatives in the majority and the liberals in dissent, instead looks like a tie that would be resolved in favor of the unions, because they won in the lower courts.
“That’s a big loss. It was all teed up and it looks like it’s not going to go anywhere now,” said Brian Fitzpatrick, a Vanderbilt University law professor who once served as a law clerk to Scalia.

Another case in which there now seems little chance of finding a court majority to upset long-standing practice involves a conservative challenge to the way governments have drawn electoral districts for 50 years.

The court heard arguments in December in a case from Texas on the meaning of the principle of “one person, one vote,” which the court has said requires that political districts be roughly equal in population.

But it has left open the question of whether states must count all residents, including noncitizens and children, or only eligible voters in drawing district lines.

The court’s upcoming look at the health care overhaul will be its fourth case involving the 2010 law. This time, the focus is on the arrangement the Obama administration worked out to spare faith-based hospitals, colleges and charities from paying for contraceptives for women covered under their health plans, while still ensuring that those women can obtain birth control at no extra cost as the law requires.

The faith-based groups argue that the accommodation still makes them complicit in providing contraception to which they have religious objections.

A tie vote here would sow rather than alleviate confusion because the appellate courts that have looked at the issue have not all come out the same way.

That prospect suggests that Justice Anthony Kennedy will join the court’s four liberal justices to uphold the arrangement, Supreme Court lawyer Thomas Goldstein said.

Other big cases before the justices this term include affirmative action, abortion and immigration.

With Justice Elena Kagan out of the affirmative action case, the court still is more likely to rule, 4-3, in favor of a challenge to the consideration of race in admissions to the University of Texas.

On abortion and immigration, a 4-4 tie would sustain lower court rulings in favor of Texas’ regulation of abortion clinics and a Republican-led challenge to an Obama administration plan to allow millions of immigrants who are in the country illegally to avoid deportation and acquire work permits. (Contributor: By ABC News)

The death of Justice Antonin Scalia leaves a huge void on the U.S. Supreme Court, where his conservative views on constitutional authority will be greatly missed. For intercessors, the challenges to fervent, faithful prayer increase. Pray for a deeper intercessory commitment and intensity for yourself and all American Christians. Our help comes from the Lord, not from the court system.

“Then [God said]… ‘Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?’” (Jer. 32:27)

**URGENT CALLS BEGIN FOR SCALIA AUTOPSY**

The seemingly quick conclusion that Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died of “natural causes” is prompting calls for an autopsy and toxicological reports.
William Gheen, president of the Americans for Legal Immigration political action committee, noted the media’s “rush” to proclaim Scalia’s death in a rented room in a resort in Texas as either “natural causes” or heart attack within hours of the discovery of his body Saturday morning.

“Anytime a head of state, member of Congress, or the most conservative member of the U.S. Supreme Court is found dead, an extensive autopsy and toxicology examination should be both immediate and mandatory,” said Gheen. “The horrid reaction and comments about his death expressed by many liberals online illustrate that Scalia was hated by many people.”

Gheen said Scalia’s death “hands the power of the Supreme Court to the modern left for the first time in American history.”

“The court can now vote, even without a replacement of Scalia, to radically change the United States of America,” he said. “Scalia’s death means the Supreme Court is now very likely to rubber stamp Obama’s unconstitutional amnesty orders, tear down Republican drawn districts in many states including North Carolina, and take deep left turns on abortion, gun rights, or anything the liberals have ever dreamed of. Scalia was a solid vote against Obama’s immigration orders to be decided by April of this year.

“We do not contend there is a conspiracy, we contend that there should be no doubts, and the way authorities and the media are rushing conclusions will leave major doubts and legitimate concerns about a death that could lead to a radical political transformation of America to the left,” said Gheen.

Chris Lujan of Sunset Funeral Homes in El Paso said the body of the late justice arrived early Sunday. Scalia had been staying at the Cibolo Creek Ranch in Presidio County, Texas, during a quail hunting trip, said federal officials. He was 79.

Presidio County Judge Cinderela Guevara, who pronounced Scalia dead, said the death certificate will say the cause of death was natural and that he died of a heart attack.

She said she decided not to order an autopsy after Sheriff Danny Dominguez concluded there were no signs of foul play, reported WFAA News in Dallas. The Scalia family concurred.

“As part of my investigation, one of the things I did ask the sheriff and the U.S. Marshal: ‘Were there any signs of foul play?’ And they said, ‘absolutely not.’ At that time, I still wanted to be careful, and asked them if [Scalia’s] physician would call me,” Guevara said.

Guevara said she talked to Scalia’s doctor in Washington, D.C., who told her he had been sick and had been at his office Wednesday and Thursday before going on the hunting trip Friday.

According to Guevara, Scalia told his group Friday at dinner he was not feeling well and went to his room early. He then missed breakfast and lunch Saturday and was found unresponsive in his bed.

The owner of the Texas ranch and resort said Scalia died peacefully.

“The judge, when I found him Saturday morning, was in complete repose,” John Poindexter, the owner of Cibolo Creek Ranch in Marfa, Texas, told NBC News. “He was very peaceful in his — in the bed. He had obviously passed away with no difficulty at all in the middle of the night.”

Scalia, who was appointed to the high court by former President Ronald Reagan, was the longest-serving justice on the court, having taken his seat on Sept. 26, 1986.

The Washington Post reported that after Scalia’s body was found:
It then took hours for authorities in remote West Texas to find a justice of the peace, officials said Sunday. When they did, she pronounced Scalia dead of natural causes without seeing the body and decided not to order an autopsy. A second justice of the peace, who was called but couldn’t get to Scalia’s body in time, said she would have ordered an autopsy.

As late as Sunday afternoon, there were conflicting reports about whether an autopsy would be performed, though officials later said Scalia’s body was being embalmed and there would be no autopsy. One report, by WFAA-TV in Dallas, said the death certificate would show the cause of the death was a heart attack.

As late as Sunday afternoon, for example, there were conflicting reports about whether an autopsy should have been performed. A manager at the El Paso funeral home where Scalia’s body was taken said his family made it clear that they did not want one.

Meanwhile, Presidio County Judge Cinderela Guevara acknowledged that she pronounced Scalia dead by phone, without seeing his body. Instead, she spoke to law enforcement officials at the scene – who assured her “there were no signs of foul play” – and Scalia’s physician in Washington, who said that the 79-year-old justice suffered from a host of chronic conditions.

“He was having health issues,” Guevara said, adding that she is awaiting a statement from Scalia’s doctor that will be added to his death certificate when it is issued later this week.

Guevara also rebutted a report by a Dallas TV station that quoted her as saying that Scalia had died of “myocardial infarction.” In an interview with The Washington Post, she said she meant only that his heart had stopped.

“It wasn’t a heart attack,” Guevara said. “He died of natural causes.”

Despite calls from conservatives for his seat to not be filled until a new president was elected, President Obama said Saturday he intends to nominate a replacement before his term ends.

CBS and the Associated Press report that authorities, including Presidio County Judge Cinderela Guevara, are considering an autopsy, although toxicological testing could already be in doubt due to the delay. There is also a report that after arriving at 3:30 a.m. on Sunday, the Sunset Funeral Home embalmed Scalia’s remains, according to Chris Lujuan, a funeral home manager. The embalming process could destroy vital toxicology evidence.

Gheen is calling on activists to call members of Congress and Presidio County Judge Guevara to demand an immediate and comprehensive investigation into what he calls “the suspiciously timed death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia that includes extensive multi-agency law enforcement forensic autopsies and toxicology reports to put these questions to rest or determine if foul play was involved.” (Contributor: World Net Daily)

Give thanks for Justice Scalia’s dedicated life and the biblical values for which he stood. The Bible tells us to “weep with those who weep.” In that spirit, pray for Mrs. Scalia and the family to find comfort in God and the Gospel. Conspiracy theories abound when high-profile, politically charged deaths occur suddenly. Pray for truth to be revealed and Mr. Scalia’s legacy to live on.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” (Rom. 12:15)
The following is a script from “John Brennan” which aired on Feb. 14, 2016. Scott Pelley is the correspondent. Robert G. Anderson, Pat Milton and Aaron Weisz, producers.

The ISIS assault on Paris and the ISIS-inspired massacre in San Bernardino, California, share a disturbing fact, no one saw them coming. Today, the biggest terrorist threat to the United States is not like al Qaeda. ISIS is wealthy, agile, sophisticated online, and operates freely in a vast territory of its own. It prefers to be called the Islamic State....

John Brennan: I think ISIS does want to eventually find its... its mark here.

Scott Pelley: You're expecting an attack in the United States?

John Brennan: I'm expecting them to try to put in place the operatives, the material or whatever else that they need to do or to incite people to carry out these attacks, clearly. So I believe that their attempts are inevitable. I don't think their successes necessarily are.

Scott Pelley: Can you explain to the folks watching this interview why these people wanna kill us? How does attacking the United States further their interests?

John Brennan: Yea, I think they're trying to provoke a clash between the West and the Muslim world, or the world that they are in as a way to gain more adherents. Because what they are claiming is that the United States is trying to take over their countries which is the furthest thing from the truth.

Paris was a failure of intelligence. All but one of the eight terrorists were French citizens, trained by ISIS in Syria. They returned, unnoticed, and attacked six locations killing 130 people.

Scott Pelley: What did you learn from Paris?

John Brennan: That there is a lot that ISIS probably has underway that we don't have obviously full insight into. We knew the system was blinking red. We knew just in the days before that ISIS was trying to carry out something. But the individuals involved have been able to take advantage of the newly available means of communication that are--that are walled off, from law enforcement officials.

Scott Pelley: You're talking about encrypted Internet communications.

John Brennan: Yeah, I'm talking about the very sophisticated use of these technologies and communication systems.

Scott Pelley: After Paris you told your people what?

John Brennan: We gotta work harder. We have to work harder. We need to have the capabilities, the technical capabilities, the human sources. We need to be able to have advanced notice about this so that we can take this-- the steps to stop them. Believe me, intelligence security services have stopped numerous attacks-- operatives-- that have been moved from maybe the Iraq to Syria theater into Europe. They have been stopped and interdicted and arrested and detained and debriefed because of very, very good intelligence.

But the failure in Paris allowed ISIS to attack with bombs and assault rifles. And Brennan told us there's more in their arsenal.
Scott Pelley: Does ISIS have chemical weapons?

John Brennan: We have a number of instances where ISIS has used chemical munitions on the battlefield.

Scott Pelley: Artillery shells.


Scott Pelley: ISIS has access to chemical artillery shells?

John Brennan: Uh-huh (affirm). There are reports that ISIS has access to chemical precursors and munitions that they can use.

The CIA believes that ISIS has the ability to manufacture small quantities of chlorine and mustard gas.

Scott Pelley: And the capability of exporting those chemicals to the West?

John Brennan: I think there's always the potential for that. This is why it's so important to cut off the various transportation routes and smuggling routes that they have used.

Scott Pelley: Are there American assets on the ground right now hunting this down?

John Brennan: The U.S. intelligence is actively involved in being a part of the effort to destroy ISIS and to get as much insight into what they have on the ground inside of Syria and Iraq.

John Brennan has worked at the CIA for most of 36 years, ever since he saw a want ad while he was in graduate school. And he was a high-ranking executive here during the recent controversies, Iraq's phantom weapons of mass destruction and 9/11.

Scott Pelley: Do you think of water boarding as a dark time in the history of your agency?

John Brennan: Sure. Waterboarding was something that was authorized. It was something that I do not believe was appropriate. It is something that is not used now and as far as I'm concerned will not be used again.

Scott Pelley: You were in management here at the time. You didn't stop it.

John Brennan: No. I had expressed to a few people my misgivings and concerns about it but no, I did not, you know, slam my fists on a desk. I did not go in and say we shouldn't be doing this. I think long and hard about what I maybe should have done more of at the time. But it was a different time. The ashes of World Trade Center were still smoldering. We knew that other waves of attacks were planned and some that were underway.

Scott Pelley: In the year or so before 9/11 the CIA had a covert action plan to attack al Qaeda in Afghanistan. The administration at that time said, "Don't do that. We have time. We'll deal with this later." And then 9/11 happened. Is this administration making the same mistake now?

John Brennan: Well you know there are a lot of options that are presented to this administration as well as to previous administrations and the president has pursued what he believes is appropriate for us to do in order to protect the citizens of this country.

Scott Pelley: What do you think our policy would be after an ISIS-directed attack in the United States?
John Brennan: If there’s a major attack here and we had ISIS fingerprints on it certainly this would encourage us to be even more forceful in terms of what we need to do.

Scott Pelley: If our policy after an attack in the United States would be to be more forceful, why isn't that our policy now before an attack?

John Brennan: Well, I think we’re being as forceful as we can be in making sure that we’re being surgical though as well. What we don't want to do is to alienate others within that region and have any type of indiscriminate actions that are going to lead to deaths of additional civilians.

The CIA Brennan leads from Langley, Virginia, looks nothing like the agency he joined. It's grown significantly but the numbers are secret. CIA fights with its own ground troops and has an air force of drones. The complexity of threats today is unprecedented; hacking, the emergence of a more aggressive China, North Korea, Russia and Iran and countries failing all across the Middle East.

Scott Pelley: In addition to Syria you are now dealing with failed states in Libya, Somalia, Yemen. How do you develop intelligence in all of these countries where the U.S. has no presence?

John Brennan: We need to be able to operate in areas that are denied to us. We find a way to have our eyes and ears there so that we can inform our policy makers. I do think though that this is going to be more and more a feature of the future. And we here at CIA are looking at how we need to enhance our expeditionary capabilities and activities because we need to be on the front lines.

Scott Pelley: Well do you imagine setting up CIA bases, covert bases in many of these countries?

John Brennan: I see CIA needing to have the presence as well as an ability to collect intelligence and interact with the locals. And we are in fact doing that in a number of those areas.

Scott Pelley: Who around here has the authority to OK a drone strike?

John Brennan: I know there are a lot of reports about the CIA's role and involvement on that. And I think as you can understand I'm not going to address any of those reports about CIA's covert action activities.

Scott Pelley: Do you have to accept the deaths of civilians when making a decision about using these weapons? Do you have to say, “There are likely to be civilians killed here but it's worth it?”

John Brennan: Well ya know in war there is what's called the law of armed conflict that allows for proportional collateral, collateral being civilian deaths. I must tell you that the U.S. military and the U.S. government as a whole does an exceptionally, exceptionally strong job of minimizing to the greatest extent possible any type of collateral damage.

But it isn't necessarily a shooting war that worries Brennan most. His CIA is facing a new front in cyber. And to focus on it he set up the agency's first new directorate in more than 50 years.

John Brennan: That that cyber environment can pose a very, very serious and significant attack vector for our adversaries if they want to take down our infrastructure, if they want to create havoc in transportation systems, if they want to do great damage to our financial networks. There are safeguards being put in place. But that cyber environment is one that really is the thing that keeps me up at night.

Scott Pelley: Do other countries have the capability in turning the lights off in the United States?
John Brennan: Having the capability but then also having the intent are two different things. I think fortunately right now those who may have the capability do not have the intent. Those who may have the intent right now I believe do not have the capability. ‘Cause if they had the capability they would deploy and employ those tools.

Scott Pelley: A few months ago your personal emails were hacked. What did you learn from that, director?
John Brennan: It shows that there are ways that individuals can get into the personal emails of anybody.
Scott Pelley: Is privacy dead?
John Brennan: No. No. Privacy should never be dead.
Scott Pelley: Yea, I know it shouldn't be. But is it, in fact, with these hacktivists, with these nation-state actors, with all the things that we've learned about government snooping all around the world, isn't it effectively dead?
John Brennan: You know, it's interesting that people always point to the government or others in terms of the invasion of privacy. But--
Scott Pelley: Any government
John Brennan: --yeah, but individuals are liberally giving up their privacy, you know, sometimes wittingly and sometimes unwittingly as they give information to companies or to sales reps. Or they go out on Facebook or the various social media. They don't realize though that they are then making themselves vulnerable to exploitation.
Scott Pelley: When your secure phone rings in the middle of the night what what's your first thought?
John Brennan: It's usually one of two things. One, its bad news that something tragic has happened to a CIA officer or to U.S. personnel. Or there's been a terrorist attack somewhere of significance. And so when I reach for the phone I, you know, say a short prayer that it's not that. The other option is that I'm being asked to make a decision in the middle of the night on something that may have life and death implications. Could be something related to a covert action program.
Scott Pelley: Have officers died on your watch?
John Brennan: Yes. Yes. Not long after I came to the agency we had an officer, a former Army Ranger, went back out to Afghanistan. In the middle of the night, he heard an explosion at the compound next to his where his Afghan compatriots were sleeping. He grabbed his gear, he went over there. Another explosion took place. Rather than taking cover he went right to the middle of the fight and started to drag his wounded Afghan partners out of harm's way. He was hit twice. Continued to fire. Then as he was continuing to protect his colleagues and comrades, a hand grenade landed not too far from him and he was mortally wounded.

Brennan told us that he has gone to Dover, Delaware, to receive the remains of his fallen. But he can only go when he won't be seen, so no one will connect the body under the flag with the CIA. At headquarters, anonymous stars are carved for the dead. 113 in all, 31 since 9/11. And Brennan presides over an annual memorial for families.

John Brennan: We have family members of agency officers who died in the 1950s whose grandchildren, grandnieces and nephews come back here in order to feel a part of this agency. So it's a great, great honor to be a part of this organization where, again, selfless men and women of the agency have done their absolute best. Have we made mistakes? Yeah, we have. Do we need to be held accountable for them? Yeah. But let's
not forget the sacrifices that have been made in the name of CIA. (Contributor: By Scott Pelley for CBS 60 Minutes)

The Bible instructs us to offer “prayers…for all men…and all who are in authority.” We often pray for the president, congressional leaders, and Supreme Court justices, but may overlook military leaders, CIA forces, FBI agents, and even our local police personnel. Here is reminder to pray for ALL those who guard us from domestic terrorism, day and night.

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” (1 Tim. 2:1-2)

**SPECIAL FORCES NOT READY FOR FEMALE INTEGRATION**

At a time when U.S. special operations are devising plans for the mission of accepting women into the male domains of SEALs, Green Berets and Army Rangers, the terrorist-fighting community is facing a looming readiness problem.

The new challenge is tucked inside President Obama’s 2017 defense budget. It states that U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and its 69,000 personnel are up against “training challenges” and is seeing “minor impacts to the forces’ ability to accomplish missions” that could grow worse.

As this happens, SOCOM is looking at a spring deadline to begin tryouts for integrating women into teams where 85 percent of men oppose the move, according to a Pentagon-sponsored survey by the Rand Corp. Nearly 90 percent say that blending the sexes will lead to lowered physical standards for missions in which high endurance and brute strength are vital. Some male warriors are so opposed that Rand scholars labeled them “extreme.”

Special operations forces are deploying at one of the most frequent rotations in history during the war on terror, begun Sept. 11, 2001. After conducting hundreds of manhunts in Iraq against al Qaeda, they are back in that country preparing for raids on the Islamic State terrorist army.

Special Operations Forces (SOF), who kicked off the invasion of Afghanistan a month after the 9/11 attacks, remain in that theater. They also are deploying to North Africa and other regions to conduct counterterrorism training and occasional raids.

“We are a force who has been heavily deployed over the last 14 years, and our military members, civilians and their families have paid a significant price, physically and emotionally, serving our country,” Army Gen. Joseph Votel, SOCOM commander, told Congress last year.

Training for these precise covert missions is critical.

SOCOM’s budget is remaining steady at about $10 billion. But the money crunch comes from the four services that contribute funding for special operations personnel and training time.

The Pentagon’s budget next fiscal year is $523 billion, not counting overseas war costs. That is about the same spending level as fiscal 2016 and less than the $528 billion of five years ago.
“One of USSOCOM’s greatest concerns is the potential impact of fiscal reductions in military departments’ readiness, which directly affects SOF,” the Obama budget says. “The USSOCOM has already witnessed reductions to the military departments that negatively affect SOF in a variety of ways.”

In other words, if the Army and Navy cut training time or operations, it means less access for commandos.

Navy SEALs, the budget says, are already “seeing training challenges associated with lower fleet asset availability, which impacts readiness and interoperability.”

It further states: “The Marine Forces Special Operations Command is experiencing reductions in access to some important school seats. The U.S. Army Special Operations Command is seeing a reduction in the military training specific allotment as well as reduced staffing at heavily used ranges. If further Military Department program reductions become necessary, SOF is likely to see more negative impacts to its capabilities.”

SOCOM spokesmen did not immediately have cost figures for the looming women integration.

While he works out details with each service, Gen. Votel asked Defense Secretary Ashton Carter for a slight delay for submitting a plan to the Pentagon for how the command will let women try out for about 15,000 previously closed military jobs.

One challenge will be indoctrination programs to make sure skeptical male commandos accept them.

Elaine Donnelly, who heads the Center for Military Readiness, said the warrior culture change is worse than budget cuts.

“Men in special operations forces do indeed have another reason to feel stressed, for reasons worse than budget cuts and stepped-up deployments,” she said. “Vertical cohesion, meaning mutual trust up and down the chain of command, has been shattered by USSOCOM leaders who are failing to defend their interests at a time when Pentagon authorities are imposing social experiments that will cost lives and missions in special operations forces.”

Ms. Donnelly also criticized the command for allowing Rand researchers to label those adamantly opposed to women in SOF as “extreme responders.”

Leaders, she said, “turned deaf ears to politically incorrect opinions about gender integration that were expressed in official surveys and focus groups.”

The Rand report illustrates the opposition.

“Based on our survey of SOF personnel, opposition to opening SOF specialties to women is both deep and wide, with high levels of opposition across all SOF elements,” the scholars wrote. “This opposition is also deep-seated and intensely felt.

“The principal sources of this opposition [include] the belief among SOF that women do not have the physical and other capabilities to meet the demands of their SOF specialties,” they said.

A Green Beret told survey conductors: “This endeavor is a complete waste of time. Filling out this survey is yet another example of how administrative issues, such as sensitivity or gender training or other surveys, will take away from my training time. I could list hundreds of reasons why women cannot do the job that a Green Beret is required to do, but as I only have 1000 characters, I will choose the one that I think is the most important. A woman cannot physically do what I can do! I weigh 225 pounds, and 280 pounds in full kit, as did
most of the members of my ODA. I expect every person on my team to be able to drag any member of my

team out of a firefight. A 130 pound female could not do it, I don’t care how much time she spends in the
gym."

Said a Marine Corps special operator staff sergeant: “I’ve zipped up body bags on men and women. And with

men, I could eat Cheerios after. But with women? The smell of burned hair. I can’t smell it anymore, I can’t

stand it. I can’t even fire up Pop Tarts because it reminds me of the smell of burned hair.”

Meanwhile, Army recruiting offices will conduct a new set of gymnastic tests to help determine what military

jobs a recruit is physically capable of performing, beginning this summer.

Prospective soldiers will be asked to run, jump, lift a weight and throw a heavy ball — all to help the Army

figure out if the recruit can handle a job with high physical demands or should be directed to a more sedentary

assignment, The Associated Press reported. (Contributor: By Rowan Scarborough for The Washington

Times)

Pray as led and as you know the truth of the Creator’s plan for men and women. This unbalanced idea

comes in the name of “equality,” but observation and testing clearly prove that it is unworkable and

will result in military failure. It is social engineering, an outgrowth of the sexual and gender confusion

that currently drives our nation’s highest leadership. Pray Scripture, including the verse below.

“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to [God’s] word, it is because there is no light

in them.” (Isa. 8:20)

FEDS APPROVE FIRST U.S. FACTORY IN CUBA

The Obama administration approved the first U.S. factory to be built and operated in Cuba in more than 50

years, in the latest sign of the rapidly changing relationship between the United States and the communist

nation.

Cleber LLC, an Alabama-based company that builds tractors for small farms, was notified by the Treasury

Department that it could open a facility in Cuba. Co-founder Saul Berenthal said the company’s attorney was

in Havana on Monday to start the lengthy process of finalizing the agreement with the Cuban government and

hopes to start production by early 2017.

Berenthal said he was proud to get the approval, but it means even more for the future relationship between

the Cold War foes.

“Being first is great,” he said. “But for certain, we should not be the only ones. We’re hoping and expecting

many more will follow.”

A U.S. business operating in Cuba is possible because of sweeping changes made by President Obama

since his Dec. 17, 2014, announcement that the long-time enemies would re-establish diplomatic relations.

Since then, embassies have reopened in Washington and Havana, and diplomats and business people have

flooded Cuba. (Contributor: By Alan Gomez for USA TODAY)

An American factory in Cuba will aid a Marxist dictatorship and fill jobs that Americans might have

had at home. On balance, however, new doors are also opening in Cuba for the Gospel, although

mission agencies must move wisely and with discretion. The restored Cuban situation requires much

prayer. Intercede as you are led.
“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting…” (Jas. 1:5-6)

OHIO MAKES THE NINTH STATE TO DEFUND PLANNED PARENTHOOD

Ohio Gov. John Kasich is expected to sign a bill defunding Planned Parenthood, making Ohio the ninth state to do so since undercover videos exposed the abortion provider’s apparent role in harvesting the body parts of aborted babies.

The bill, H.B. 294, ensures that state and certain federal funds are not used to perform or promote nontherapeutic abortions at Planned Parenthood or elsewhere. The Ohio House passed the final version 62-32 on Wednesday and sent the legislation to the Republican governor’s desk.

“Governor Kasich has worked with legislative leaders to ensure that public dollars are used to their best purpose,” Kasich spokesman Joe Andrews said, according to The Columbus Dispatch. “The Ohio Department of Health had already stopped awarding state dollars to Planned Parenthood.”

Eight states—Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Texas, and Utah—have defunded Planned Parenthood after the pro-life Center for Medical Progress released a series of hidden-camera videos that put the nation’s largest abortion provider under the microscope for questionable and perhaps illegal practices.

Other states, such as Indiana, have worked to defund Planned Parenthood.

After passing legislation Thursday, Wisconsin also may soon deprive the organization of taxpayer dollars.

The new Ohio law will direct funds from the state Health Department budget to community health centers. It will not allow the Department of Health to contract or affiliate with entities that perform or promote nontherapeutic abortions, which don’t involve the life of the mother or cases of rape or incest.

The legislation’s sponsors were state Reps. Margaret Conditt, R-Liberty Township, and Bill Patmon, D-Cleveland.

“Ohio legislators have wisely redirected existing funding from the scandal-plagued Planned Parenthood to thousands of better, low-cost community health care providers that serve women and families far more comprehensively,” Casey Mattox, senior counsel for the legal group Alliance Defending Freedom, told The Daily Signal.

“Ohio taxpayers should not be forced into an immoral partnership with Planned Parenthood.”

After the surfacing of the Center for Medical Progress’ first undercover video in July 2015, Kasich spokesman Rob Nichols released this statement:

The governor is a strong, consistent and committed believer in the sanctity of human life and finds this news and practice abhorrent. This is illegal under both Ohio and federal laws and anyone who violates those laws should be prosecuted to the fullest extent possible, and credible evidence of a possible violation should be fully investigated.

According to Ohio Right to Life, the new law will cut over $1 million in the state’s use of yearly federal grants that had gone to Planned Parenthood.
“Thanks to the thoughtful, careful work of the Ohio House and Senate, the taxpayer dollars of pro-life Ohioans like myself will now be shielded from the abortion industry,” Stephanie Ranade Krider, executive director of Ohio Right to Life, said in a formal statement. She added:

This is an incredible victory for the pro-life cause in Ohio and for the national pro-life movement’s collective efforts to defund the abortion industry chief, Planned Parenthood.

This legislation will mark the extraordinary moment when Ohio decided to get out of the abortion business.

The Ohio House first passed the bill in November and sent it to the Ohio Senate. When the Senate in turn voted in late January to defund Planned Parenthood, Stephanie Kight, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio, released a statement saying the Ohio General Assembly “chose politics over people.”

“This is not what Ohioans want,” Kight said.

Sarah Torre, a policy analyst in the DeVos Center for Religion and Civil Society at The Heritage Foundation, wrote that Planned Parenthood affiliates receive over half a billion dollars each year from state and federal sources.

“Congress should end federal taxpayer funding to Planned Parenthood affiliates and redirect those funds to health centers that provide health care for women without entanglement in abortion or questionable handling of baby body parts,” Torre wrote. (Contributor: By Leah Jessen for The Daily Signal)

Ohio joins a growing number of states withholding funds from Planned Parenthood. Yet, President Obama and certain candidates running for president ardently support this national monstrosity that revels in killing babies in the womb — the most defenseless portion of our human population. Pray that more Christians will remember these issues when voting in November.

“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20)

**SCIENTISTS CAN MAKE MINI, THINKING VERSION OF YOUR BRAIN**

The small cellular balls act like mini-brains, mimicking aspects of the real thing, including forming noggin-like structures and pulsing with electrical signals like a thinking mind, researchers reported Friday at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington. The mini-brains, which can be personalized based on whose cells they’re made from, may soon help scientists study a wide variety of diseases and health problems—from autism and Parkinson’s to multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer’s, as well as stroke, brain trauma, and infections, such as Zika virus.

“There are a variety of places where a mini brain could be useful,” said Wayne Drevets of Janssen Pharmaceuticals Inc., who was not involved with the research. In some cases, they may offer a cheaper, more ethical, and more realistic model for human health than mice and other animals, he and other researchers said at the conference.

Researchers who developed the wee noodles, led by Thomas Hartung, of Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, hope to have the mini-brains commercially available this year.
But, Hartung admits, “we are not the first or the fanciest.” Other miniature brains have already been made that are more complex and brain-shaped rather than spherical. Yet those tiny brains can be difficult to create and work with, Hartung says. Some require embryonic stem cells to make, which are tricky to get and ethnically murky to use. And some of the miniature brains take months to grow and are relatively large (~5 millimeters), which means that they quickly rot from the inside out because they lack blood vessels and circulation to feed the cells imbedded deep in the artificial organ.

Hartung and colleagues came up with a solution to all of those problems. The researchers started off with easy-to-collect adult skin cells and chemically coaxed them to revert to stem cells, nixing the need for embryonic versions. From there, the researchers cajoled the cells into differentiating into a variety of brain cells, including different nerve cells plus glial cells, which support and protect nerve cells.

To get the cells to form teeny brain balls, the researchers put the cells in a shaking incubator where the cells literally roll into small spheres around 350 micrometers in diameter—roughly about three times the thickness of a dollar bill. The tiny size allows the brains to slip past the problem of rotting innards, but they still maintain a brain-like set up with different types of neurons linking up and passing signals. The whole process takes just eight weeks and can produce thousands of mini-brains at once.

On closer examination, the researchers found that many of the nerve cells in the mini-brains developed electrical insulating layers—myelin sheaths—which are made by glial cells and critical for properly functioning nerve cells. Demyelination is a key feature of many neurodegenerative diseases, such as multiple sclerosis (MS). “This promises to be a fantastic model to study MS,” Hartung said.

And the mini-brains spontaneously generated electrical activity, producing brain waves. “They are thinking,” Hartung said—although without any sensory information input, “they have nothing to think about,” he added.

There are countless possibilities of how these brains could help research, Hartung said. In particular, he told Ars that he’s most excited to use the mini-brains to study autism and has already made mini-brains from cells from a person with Down Syndrome. He’s also hopeful that the brains will be useful for pharmaceutical companies testing potential new drugs—offering a more realistic model for how drugs work in people without the need to use animals. After all, Hartung said, humans aren’t 150-pound rats.

But, right now, he cautions, “I’m selling hopes,” as the mini-brains are brand new and haven’t proven useful yet. Still, many researchers at the conference were equally enthused about their potential. After presenting at the meeting, Hartung is now in talks to use the brains to study Zika. The virus, currently exploding throughout South and Central America, has been linked to neurological conditions (some involving demyelination) and a birth defect called microcephaly, in which babies are born with abnormally small and malformed brains.

Others saw potential for the brains to help with development and psychiatry research. Wilson Compton a drug addiction researcher at the National Institutes of Health hopes the brains could help understand how specific brain regions re-wire in addiction. Overall, he said, the brains are a “promising development.” (Contributor: By Beth Mole for arstechnica)

This is a “watch and pray” article. We present random science-discovery pieces in The Informer. There is no prayer focus, as we see where the science might be going, not where it has arrived. If there are no biblical violations, and the application helps autistic children or elderly patients with Alzheimer’s disease, we will give thanks. Watch cautiously and pray as you are led.

“Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” (Ps. 100:3)