

# Obama defunds 'snowflake babies'; program aids in embryo adoption

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Byline: Cheryl Wetzstein, THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The federal government's only program aimed at preventing the discarding of extra frozen human embryos is itself in danger of being discarded.

In a move that pro-lifers are calling more evidence of the Obama administration's pro-abortion slant, the White House has sought to defund the Embryo Adoption Awareness Campaign in its fiscal 2013 budget.

The Department of Health and Human Services is not requesting funds for this program because the Embryo Adoption program will be discontinued in FY2013, HHS officials said in a February funding report to Congress.

While some observers support this move as a way to free up funds for more urgent reproductive-health concerns, supporters of embryo adoption say this is the wrong time to abandon embryos that are sometimes called snowflake babies.

"I think that daily we talk to people about .. embryo donation and adoption, and we hear the response, 'Really?'

I didn't know that was even possible," said Ron Stoddart, executive director of Nightlight Christian Adoptions, which in 1997 pioneered the process of infertile couples "adopting" the extra embryos that

another couple's in-vitro fertilization process inevitably produces

Hannah Strege, the first of these frozen, unique snowflake babies, was born in December 1998. Researchers think as many as 50,000 of the 600,000 cryogenically preserved embryos in the U.S. eventually could become available for adoption.

The fate of the embryo-adoption awareness program is not known. As with all White House budget requests, congressional appropriations committees will decide whether they become law.

Applicant pools

The HHS report said the reason to end the \$1.9 million embryo-adoption awareness program is limited interest. Only a very small pool of applicants, many of whom are repeat recipients, are seeking the grants, it said.

Mailee Smith, staff counsel at Americans United for Life, said such a decision is more evidence of the pro-

abortion slant of this administration.

Why would the Obama administration cut \$2 million for adoption awareness, but keep \$1 million a day for Planned Parenthood? she asked.

Also, having hundreds of thousands of frozen human embryos in storage is a devastating situation for many people, Ms. Smith said.

What people disagree about is the solution for these embryos, she said, and if there is no support for embryo adoption, what we're seeing is the elimination of the moral solution.

Barbara Collura, executive director of Resolve: The National Infertility Association, said she thinks the \$23 million Congress already has spent on embryo-adoption awareness has done the trick.

To be honest, it doesn't surprise me at all to see the program defunded, said Ms. Collura, whose organization won more than \$2 million in embryo-adoption awareness funds.

The funding certainly made a difference in terms of people's awareness about this family-building option, and yet it serves a relatively small population, she said. We have too many people who don't know enough about infertility, and we would like to see more funding in general for that.

Viable option

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, 7.3 million women of childbearing age, or nearly 12 percent, have impaired fecundity. Male infertility is a significant issue, too, as about 17 percent of infertility is linked to the male factor, Ms. Collura said.

An embryo donation and adoption program is a proven strategy to help couples achieve parenthood, said Dr. Jeffrey Keenan, medical director at the National Embryo Donation Center in Knoxville, Tenn., which has won \$3.5 million in federal grants.

It also opens a door for couples with extra embryos who have moral objections to destroying them, either by discarding them or giving them to researchers, said Dr. Keenan, adding that the center has 150 sets of frozen embryos in storage, with up to 15 embryos in each set, waiting for adoptive parents.

Between 2004 and 2009 alone, about 1,900 infants were born from the adoption process in the U.S., said Dr. Reg Finger, director of the Embryo Donation Services Center, which also was created with federal grant funding.

Embryo adoption gave me a 40 percent chance to have a baby, after being told there was a 1 [percent] to 2 percent chance of ever having a child, said Leslie Warren, an Alabama social services worker whose 15-month-old son is one of nearly 400 babies born at the center.

If there's no awareness program, who is going to advocate for these embryos? asked Jennifer Wright, a Phoenix-area mother who writes a Snowflake Family blog about her and her husband's 1-year-old son.

Adopting parents might be able to find out about embryo adoption, but the genetic parents might continue to think that their only choices are to use their embryos or destroy them, Mrs. Wright said.

If you are not involved in an infertility situation, you have no idea of the need for embryo adoption, said Marti Bailey, who has twins from embryo adoption and talked about the process with adoption lawyers, counselors, clinics and adoption agencies when she worked with the donation center several years ago.

### Stem-cell research

The federal government has funded embryo-adoption awareness since 2002 in response to the furor over stem-cell research, which destroys the embryos in the process of culling them for the stem cells.

President Bush steadfastly vetoed legislation opening up federal funding for research on new stem-cell lines and instead touted embryo adoption as a choice for couples with extra frozen embryos.

The children here today remind us that there is no such thing as a spare embryo, Mr. Bush said at a 2005 White House event with snowflake children and their families.

These lives are not raw material to be exploited, but gifts, he said pointedly.

But in March 2009, President Obama authorized more funding for embryonic stem-cell research, and federal guidelines now let couples donate unwanted frozen embryos to such researchers with the proviso that they cannot receive cash, services or special treatment in exchange for their donations.

Mr. Stoddart, whose organization uses federal funds to run [embryoadopt.org](http://embryoadopt.org), said there are several reasons to continue the funding.

The number of human embryos in storage is still increasing, as are the number of babies born from embryo adoption, he said, noting that his agency's own Snowflakes Embryo Adoption program is expecting its 300th child to be born March 30.

The number of adoption agencies opening embryo-adoption programs also is increasing, said Mr. Stoddart. So those three factors would clearly indicate to me, and I think, any objective observer, that there's an increasing interest in embryo donation and adoption.

But, except for the federal program, there is no other source of funding for an awareness campaign, he said.

By Cheryl Wetzstein, THE WASHINGTON TIMES

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