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The Times

MONDAY, AUGUST 24, 2026 | TIMESONLINE.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Activists have intensified efforts to extend legal rights to embryos and fetuses. Personhood arguments now surface in not only abortion restrictions but also disputes involving pregnancy loss, child support and taxes.

ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES FILE

Embryo personhood debate gains notice

HHS guidelines add to movement's momentum after Dobbs decision

Risa Cromer
Purdue University
THE CONVERSATION

About 100,000 babies were born through in vitro fertilization in 2024, according to the most recent U.S. data. But IVF commonly involves trying to create multiple embryos, because success is never guaranteed. If unused, those embryos can be frozen, discarded, donated to research or donated to another fertility patient.

In the eyes of some anti-abortion activists, those frozen IVF embryos are already children – children who need to be “adopted” into families. And that idea now appears in a federal document: grant guidelines announced by the Department of Health and Human Services in June.

The department's Embryo Adoption Awareness and Services program has

An embryologist pulls out vials of human embryos from a liquid nitrogen storage container at a California IVF clinic in 2007. Grant guidelines announced by the Department of Health and Human Services in June describe IVF embryos as “children who already exist and are in need of a family.”

SANDY HUFFAKER/GETTY IMAGES

existed since 2002. But this year's funding notice describes IVF embryos as “children who already exist and are in need of a family.” Rather than presenting “embryo adoption” as one option among many for patients with remaining em-

bryos, the document describes the practice as centered on embryos' “rights” and “best interests.” This language draws from a

See EMBRYOS, Page 3A

Iran says threatened sanctions by U.S. will fail

Elwely Elwely and Menna AlaaELDin
REUTERS

DUBAI – Iran's foreign minister dismissed the threat of new U.S. sanctions as a sign of desperation on Aug.

23 and said the expected new measures would fail to defeat Tehran.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who is due to hold a press conference at 2 p.m. ET on Aug. 24, has threatened to impose “the toughest sanctions in history” on Iran.

Iran's economy is already under major pressure from international sanctions, its infrastructure has been hit repeatedly and thousands of people have been killed in air strikes on the Islamic Republic since the United

See IRAN, Page 2A

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