



Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities

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Dear Senator:

Soon the U.S. Senate will again vote on legislation (S. 5) to promote the destruction of human embryos to obtain their stem cells. With enactment of such legislation, federal law would for the first time force taxpayers to encourage deliberate attacks on innocent human life in the name of medical progress.

Yet this issue is not a matter of *supporting* vs. *opposing* progress. The question is whether our technical progress is guided by an equally advanced sense of the dignity of each and every human life, so our technology becomes a servant to humanity and not our cruel master. The technological imperative – the conviction that if an interesting research avenue exists, it must be pursued whatever the moral and human cost – has governed this debate for too long. As Pope Benedict XVI said to stem cell researchers in Rome last September, research that relies on “the planned suppression of human beings who already exist, even if they have not yet been born,” is “not truly at the service of humanity.”

On a practical level, embryonic stem cell research has been as disappointing in its results as it has been divisive to our society. After almost three decades of research in mouse embryonic stem cells and nine years in the human variety, researchers can scarcely point to any safe and effective “cure” in mice let alone human beings. Problems such as uncontrollable growth and tumor formation have forced researchers to conclude that it may take a decade or more of very expensive research even to determine whether embryonic stem cells may someday be used to treat a human condition.

At the same time, ethically sound research using non-embryonic stem cells has continued to advance, helping patients with over 70 conditions in clinical trials (see www.stemcellresearch.org). Since Congress debated this issue last summer, further evidence has emerged on the versatility of adult stem cells, and on their ability to be reprogrammed to enhance this quality. It seems virtually every byproduct of live birth – amniotic fluid, amniotic membrane, placenta, cord blood, and the tissue of the umbilical cord itself – contains stem cells that may rival embryonic stem cells in their flexibility.

The Senate will also vote on legislation (S. 30) to promote these morally acceptable forms of stem cell research. This bill funds all avenues of stem cell research that do *not* involve harming or destroying a living human embryo. Unlike S. 5, it gives priority to research that promises genuine benefits for patients in the short term – a priority that supporters of S. 5 have neglected in their zeal for speculative embryo research. The bill includes a proposal to study the feasibility of banking amniotic and placental stem cells, modeled on the banking of bone marrow and cord blood stem cells that have saved the lives of patients with dozens of conditions.

S. 30 also funds research in new techniques for deriving embryonic or embryonic-like stem cells without harming embryos. Some techniques are hypothetical in humans, and it is not known whether they will produce usable stem cells without posing risks to human life. However, the legislation appropriately places the burden of proof on researchers to show which techniques will meet this standard, and provides for testing in animal models first to ensure that no human embryo is harmed. Here S. 30 uses the accurate definition of "human embryo" that has helped prevent federally funded harm to embryonic humans for a decade, as part of the annual Labor/HHS appropriations bills.

Supporters of S. 5 have also added a section to their bill promoting such alternative techniques. However, this language is inferior to that of S. 30 on medical and ethical grounds. It includes no provision for stem cells with great clinical promise (unless they are also shown to be "pluripotent"), and no provision for banking amniotic and placental stem cells. More troubling, it refuses even to define the key term "human embryo," but automatically references whatever definition happens to appear in a given year's appropriations bill – an unacceptable loophole at a time when the appropriations process is controlled by those who support embryo destruction.

The most serious defect in the "alternative" attachment to S. 5, however, is what it is attached *to*. The sponsors are saying they will explore ways to achieve the benefits of stem cell research within moral limits, but only if they can also violate those limits.

Leading supporters of embryonic stem cell research, such as President Clinton's National Bioethics Advisory Commission, have conceded that "the derivation of stem cells from embryos remaining following infertility treatments is justifiable only if no less morally problematic alternatives are available for advancing the research." If the research can be done without destroying life, said the Commission, it *must* be done only in that way. S. 5 acknowledges that this may well be feasible, then insists on destroying life regardless. The section added to S. 5 does not remedy the legislation's ethical problems, but only underscores the underlying bill's cavalier attitude toward moral limits.

I urge you to vote against S. 5 -- on behalf of taxpayers who should not be forced to help destroy life in the name of "progress," and on behalf of genuine progress for suffering patients. Members of Congress wanting to explore all avenues of stem cell research consistent with fundamental ethical principles have the opportunity to vote instead for S. 30. Please support medical progress that we can all live with.

Sincerely,



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