



Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities

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Dear Member of Congress:

The House may soon vote on whether federal funds should be used to encourage large-scale destruction of innocent human life for research purposes. H.R. 810, the Castle/DeGette bill on stem cell research, would rescind President Bush's policy on embryonic stem cell (ESC) research, so the offer of federal funds for such research can be used to encourage researchers to destroy new human embryos from fertility clinics for their cells. I urge you in the strongest possible terms to oppose all destructive and morally offensive proposals of this kind.

Government has no business forcing taxpayers to become complicit in the direct destruction of human life at any stage. Nor is there any point in denying the scientific fact that human life is exactly what is at stake here.

Even government advisory groups recommending destructive embryo research have recognized that human embryos "deserve respect as a form of human life" (see National Bioethics Advisory Commission, *Ethical Issues in Human Stem Cell Research*, 1999, p. ii). What these groups have never managed to show is how one can claim to "respect" human beings one is treating as mere crops for harvesting.

Rightly rejecting such a crass utilitarian approach, since 1995 Congress has passed – and Presidents of both major parties have signed – annual riders insisting that early human embryos be protected from risk of harm or death in federally funded research projects. H.R. 810 radically departs from this precedent by encouraging researchers to kill human embryos, or pay others to kill them, to become eligible for federal stem cell research grants.

The argument that these human embryos "would be discarded anyway" carries no moral weight. The fact that many abortions are performed in the U.S. creates no argument that Congress must use its funding power to promote such killing. By the same token, the fact that condemned prisoners or terminally ill patients will "die soon anyway" gives no government, and indeed no individual, a special right to conduct lethal experiments on them. In the case of human embryos now frozen in fertility clinics, this argument also rests on a false factual premise, because embryos already selected by their parents for discarding are barred from being used in research and vice versa. On the other hand, if Congress is trying to influence *future* decisions by parents tempted to discard embryos, why would it intervene to encourage destruction for research, instead of encouraging a decision to let their embryonic children survive? The obvious answer is that Congress will have made its own immoral decision that these developing human beings are worth more dead than alive.

It would be bad enough to promote such destruction of life if it had been found necessary to save patients with devastating diseases. In such a case it would be important to remember that the end, however worthwhile in itself, does not justify an evil means. But in fact, the practical argument for funding ESC research fails even on its own amoral terms. For **adult stem cells and other avenues posing no moral problem have advanced quickly toward human clinical trials to treat juvenile diabetes, corneal damage, Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injury, sickle-cell anemia, cardiac damage and many other conditions.** (For details see www.stemcellresearch.org.) At the same time, researchers increasingly acknowledge that the apparent initial "promise" of ESCs was exaggerated. For example, because of their genetic instability and tendency to form potentially lethal tumors in host animals, these cells may not be ready for human clinical trials for many years, if ever. (See www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/bioethic/stemcell/obstacles51004.htm.)

At this point in medical science, the question is not whether alternative ways are available to pursue the therapeutic goals served by ESCs – rather, it is whether ESCs will ever catch up with the therapeutic benefits now arising from the alternatives. After decades of research in animal ESCs and over six years of concentrated research on human ESCs, no safe and effective therapeutic use for ESCs has been discovered. Even the utilitarian argument for forcing taxpayers to fund ESC research lacks any firm basis in the facts.

The current federal policy of funding research on a limited number of existing ESC lines has achieved its stated goal – that of exploring which avenues of stem cell research will most quickly and effectively lead to promising treatments. The emerging answer is that ESC research is not one of those avenues. If there is to be any change in the existing policy, it should be to end this limited funding of ESC research altogether, so taxpayers' resources can more effectively be marshaled for research now showing itself to be more ethically *and* medically sound.

To insist now on a *broader* policy of promoting ESC research, using federal funds to encourage more destruction of human embryos, would fly in the face of the medical evidence and violate even the most minimal standards of respect for early human life. I urge you to reject H.R. 810 and any similar proposal, and instead to support promising medical research that all Americans can live with.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William H. Keeler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cardinal William H. Keeler
Archbishop of Baltimore
Chairman, Committee for Pro-Life Activities
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops