

Weekly Report
Week of 12-27

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HUMAN CLONING: DOES MISSOURI'S BIOTECH INDUSTRY NEED IT IN ORDER TO PROSPER?

This week I am continuing my series of columns on the subject of human cloning and stem cell research. This topic warrants such close attention since it promises to be one of the most controversial yet most misunderstood issues to be faced by the legislature during the 2005 legislative session that begins next week.

Since some of you may not have had the opportunity to read my previous columns let me briefly recap an important point. There are two kinds of stem cells, adult and embryonic. I have no objections to adult stem cell research and in fact, I strongly support it. What I do object to is embryonic stem cell research since it causes the destruction of a human embryo created either through cloning or natural fertilization.

In this week's column I'd like to address another powerful misconception that unfortunately has become entrenched in the minds of many. Opponents of my bill to ban human cloning and embryonic stem cell research claim that Missouri will suffer economic disaster in our fledgling biotech industry if my legislation is approved. This sounds plausible but a closer look reveals just the opposite. Many states and nations around the world do not allow embryonic stem cell research. If such a ban stifles the growth of biotech industries no doubt we'd see the economic effects in these areas.

Let's look at the example of our sister state of Michigan. Michigan does not allow research on human embryos created through cloning or fertilization. Yet over 70 new companies have begun life sciences work in the state in the last three years, earning Michigan the distinction of being the fastest growing area in the nation in life sciences research.

Internationally, Germany has emerged as the leading European nation in the area of biotechnology. This is interesting since Germany also has Europe's most stringent law protecting human embryos from research. German law bans research both on embryos created through cloning and those created through natural conception.

Examples from other states and nations could be cited but the two examples given above make my point – allowing scientists to conduct research unfettered by moral restraint does not necessarily translate into a robust biotech industry. There is a relatively simple reason for this fact. The field of embryonic stem cell research has not proved to be a sound investment for private corporations. *Forbes* magazine reports that many stem cell research companies have gone under and most major drug companies have not invested in this field of research.

I might add that this is the reason we see states like California investing billions of taxpayer dollars in embryonic stem cell research. If investors thought this field was promising there would be ample private funds available. However, the private sector has not been enthusiastic about this type of research so government is being asked to subsidize it.

I also find it especially interesting to note that the overwhelming majority of positive developments in stem cell research have come from non-controversial adult stem cells. Next week we'll look at this issue in depth.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us or by phone at (888) 711-9278.