

Column from Sen. Matt Bartle for

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Controversial Amendment to Allow Cloning Raises Fundamental Questions of Human Life

The elections of 2006 are still more than a year away and already we are beginning to hear distant rumblings that signal the start of another campaign season. It seems like every year the peace and quiet that separates trips to the ballot box gets shorter and shorter as interest groups and candidates try to “one up” each other by kicking off the start of their campaign a bit sooner than the next guy.

Having said that, allow me to add to the growing din of voices discussing the announcement early last month that a well-financed coalition will be putting on the ballot a measure that will establish in the Missouri Constitution a right to clone human embryos and to use these embryos for scientific experiments in the hope of finding medical cures.

This ballot issue will be one of the most hotly debated in recent memory. More than just a question of gas taxes, concealed weapons or the permission of gambling in rural Missouri, this question goes to the very core of what it means to be human and forces all of us to grapple with questions surrounding the origin and worth of a human life. Adding to the volatile nature of this debate is the fact that all of us have loved ones with terrible illnesses, and we all realize that one day we too may contract some disabling disease. We all have a personal stake in this debate.

Yet, we all are heavily vested in this debate for another reason. At the dawn of a new century, science has brought us to the threshold of a brave new world. The proponents of this amendment are essentially asking that we give them a blank check to experiment on and ultimately destroy another human being in its earliest stages in exchange for a promise of beneficial medical treatments – a request forcing us to consider our own humanity. Are we ready to enter a world where human life is a mere commodity to be created and expended for the benefit of others, or does a life, regardless of how small, have intrinsic worth?

Space does not permit an in-depth analysis of the proposed amendment, and the coming year will present ample opportunities to debate the merits of the proposal, but let me leave you with a few brief points to ponder in this time of relative calm before the impressive PR machine of the backers of the amendment is put into full motion.

First, in spite of the “Madison Avenue” advertising gloss and clever wording, the amendment would authorize the same cloning procedure for humans that gave us “Dolly the Sheep.” Second, we need not heed the ‘siren song’ and follow the proponents of the amendment into their brave new world, because there is another way. In spite of the hype, the embryonic stem cell research they advocate has yet to produce any proven, peer-reviewed human treatments, and their own scientists now admit it may be decades before cures surface (and there is no guarantee that cures will ever materialize).

The silver lining in this debate is that non-controversial adult stem cell research (the stem-cell research I proudly support) has, to date, produced 65 actual human treatments for diseases ranging from cancer to sickle cell anemia with many more treatments and cures just around the corner. Yes, there is another way - a way that doesn't require us to cross ethical boundaries and a way that continues to produce real-world results.

Much more could be said, but perhaps it is most fitting if we all pause on the eve of another campaign season and promise ourselves that over the next year we will take the time to investigate the facts, ignore the hyperbole and ponder the deep and fundamental issues raised by the coming debate.

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.

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