



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



Room 433 - State Capitol Bldg. - Jefferson City, MO 65101 - Phone: (573) 751-2306

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For additional information contact:
Barbara Mustoe (573) 751-2306

A Moral Dilemma Between Potentials

JEFFERSON CITY—The Senate this week debated a bill that morally challenges the legislative body with an unprecedented intersecting of political and religious lines. Senate Bill 160 was dubbed early on as the “anti-cloning” bill, but the contentious viewpoints go beyond deciding if cloning people should be illegal. The underlying issues of the bill have forced us to compare the value of scientific advancements to our philosophies on what constitutes human life in hopes of one side outweighing the other.

Under SB 160, somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT), also known as therapeutic cloning, would be criminalized. In SCNT, the nucleus of an unfertilized egg is removed and replaced with a nucleus of another cell from a human body. The egg is then stimulated to divide, similar to what happens when it joins with a sperm, and the stem cells are then harvested for research.

Those who are against this bill base their contentions on the potential the embryonic cells have to mature into organs, other cells and body parts to help patients with diseases such as Parkinson’s. Because SCNT is a relatively new procedure, more time is needed before a revolution of cures seizes the medicinal industry as we know it. Opponents say that because no sperm is used in the harvesting of embryonic cells, there is no actual human being in the Petri dish, and there is no possibility of one ever existing unless the embryo is successfully implanted into a womb and carried to term.

Many states and countries already have a comprehensive ban on cloning of all types, including SCNT. Pro-life advocates have rooted their support for the measure in their belief that the experimental process creates life only to destroy it. SCNT was essentially the same process that resulted in the cloning of Dolly the sheep. If the cells were implanted in a woman’s womb, they have the potential to result in the birth of a human baby. Embryonic stem cells were first cultured six years ago and have yet to lead to any medical breakthroughs, unlike adult stem-cell research, which is not a divisive area of research.

The proponents of the bill hold that the intrinsic value of human life exceeds the monetary value of a life-sciences industry, which threatens to sidestep Missouri if this bill passes.

The cluster of cells under the legislative microscope is miniscule in size, but its *potential* to make a life or improve lives has propelled lawmakers, advocates and constituents into a far-from-invisible controversy that hinges on the gray areas of a moral question of what constitutes life. Both sides claim that erring on the side of human life is imperative, but which is the imperative potential in question: the potential for a medical breakthrough despite the fact that no tissue lines created thus far have been achieved without defect—or the recognition that any advance in the area must come at the cost of destroying the potential for human life?

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