



THE STOUFFER REPORT

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For the Week of:
Oct. 9, 2006

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Embryonic Stem Cell Proposal

To clone or not to clone? Curing or not curing? Adult or embryonic? In just a few short weeks we will all be making a decision that splits families, doctors, and even members of the same political party. This week my column looks at the who, what, when, where and why of one of the most controversial ballot measures being voted on this November — Amendment 2.

What is Amendment 2? This constitutional amendment would define human cloning in our Constitution, ban the practice in our state, and protect embryonic stem cell research, which is currently legal, from being regulated by local and state governments.

You can see the entire language of this amendment at www.sos.mo.gov/elections.

Who is behind Amendment 2? “Missouri Coalition for Life Saving Cures” filed the petition with the Secretary of State. This group is supported by researchers (namely the Stowers Institute in Kansas City), health-care associations, and a host of other groups, including firefighters.

Who opposes Amendment 2? The opposition to Amendment 2 is “Missourians Against Human Cloning,” which consists mostly of pro-life advocates and doctors. Several women’s activist groups are also opposing Amendment 2.

Where do stem cells come from? Adult stem cells, which are non-controversial, can be found in bone marrow, the brain, peripheral blood, blood vessels, skeletal muscle, skin and the liver. Embryonic stem cells are harvested from embryos that are produced from unfertilized eggs removed from women’s bodies.

Why do people want embryonic stem cell research? There are two main reasons — to produce life-saving cures to terrible diseases and to foster economic development. Medical researchers believe that continued research on embryonic stem cells will bring cures and treatments to diseases such as juvenile diabetes and Alzheimer's. Business and economic leaders also believe that if our Constitution protects embryonic stem cell research from state and local bans, major research companies will have an incentive to move to Missouri, as opposed to other states, and invest in scientists, facilities and research.

Why don't people want Amendment 2 to pass? Opponents of embryonic stem cell research say the language of the measure is deceptive and that the amendment actually redefines cloning. Currently, many lay people define cloning as somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT), the practice of actually taking part of a cell and implanting it into another individual's cell with the intent to create a living organism. This is how a cloned ewe in Scotland, named "Dolly," became famous.

Amendment 2 redefines this process as not being actual cloning, unless the new bundle of cells is actually placed in a mother's womb to grow.

Other concerns include the harvesting and selling of embryos in the free market and the risks of turning the female population into the donor population. Some proponents say the amendment makes it illegal for researchers to pay for embryos; however, clinics can pay for embryos and researchers can reimburse the clinics.

Opponents also say adult stem cells have created many cures in use today. They also point out that embryonic stem cell research has yet to produce a cure.

When would Amendment 2 go into effect? The amendment would become effective 30 days after the Nov. 7 election.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by e-mail at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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