
A View of Human Embryo Stem Cell Research

from a branch of the money tree

With all the hype surrounding embryonic stem cell research and human cloning research, a lot of citizens are unaware that this is a big money business for those involved. Billions of dollars have been invested in these types of unethical research practices as the promise of future cures has been continually inflated. Numerous individuals have been given false hope as public and private dollars continue to go down the drain.

Unfortunately, many politicians who have been prolife throughout their careers have faltered on these issues. Many politicians who oppose abortion because it ends the life of an innocent human being have supported or voted for legislation that encourages the cloning and/or destruction of human embryos. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) is one of the foremost of these politicians.

During his tenure in the U.S. Senate, Hatch has been outspoken in his opposition to abortion. He even sponsored a version of the Human Life Amendment. Hatch has abandoned his prolife beliefs when it comes to human embryos and human cloning for research.

Hatch has strong ties to the biotechnology industry and their main lobbying organization, Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO). BIO strongly lobbies for federal funding of human embryonic stem cell research and opposes efforts to ban human cloning for research. During the 1990's, Hatch was a leading proponent of the biotechnology industry as he worked on legislation to help them. In the 2000 election cycle, the biotechnology industry repaid Hatch for his generosity by giving his campaign \$400,000, which is more than they gave to any other congressional candidate¹. BIO also named Hatch their "Legislator of the Year" in 2002-2003².

On April 21, 2005, Senator Hatch introduced a bill (S. 876) to expressly legalize human cloning for research purposes. This bill, which is co-sponsored by some of the most pro-choice senators, allows human cloning as long as the cloned human embryos are killed before they are 14 days old. This legislation is misleadingly entitled, "Human Cloning Ban and Stem Cell Research Protection Act of 2005."³ BIO has other ties to our government officials. Their former president, Carl Feldbaum, formerly worked as Senator Arlen Specter's (R-Pennsylvania) chief of staff⁴, and their current president, Jim Greenwood, is a former U.S. Representative who was rewarded by BIO with a \$650,000 (plus bonuses) starting salary. Rep. Greenwood sponsored bills (H.R. 2608 and H.R. 2172) to encourage human cloning for research while in Congress.

¹Boston Globe, 5/3/02, "Unlikely senator supports cloning" by Michael Kranish

²Press Release from BIO on April 9, 2003. Available online at http://www.bio.org/news/newsitem.asp?id=2003_0409_03

³The text of this bill can be found online at http://www.nrlc.org/killing_embryos/S876HatchFeinstein.pdf

⁴History of BIO. Available online at <http://www.bio.org/aboutbio/history.asp>

Desiring to Patent Human Beings for Profit

In July 2003, the U.S. House of Representatives voted for a prolife amendment to prohibit the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office from issuing any patent on a human embryo. A patent gives the holder exclusive commercial rights over an invention. Patent holders can grant licenses so others can use their invention if they pay a royalty fee. The Weldon Amendment says, "None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this act may be used to issue patents on claims directed to or encompassing a human organism." In January of 2004, President Bush signed this amendment into law.

BIO lobbied hard against this bill and has vowed to overturn it in the future. Some biotechnology firms are hoping that they will be able to clone human embryos with specific traits, patent them and then collect royalties from other biotechnology companies who hope to use these embryos or clones of the embryos.

Before the Weldon Amendment was passed, human cloning research proponent Alto Charo "noted that rejecting a patent also affects investors' willingness to put money into laboratories, and this could also ultimately affect scientific research." She added that "investors hope for a return on their original investment with the basic research, but with no patent, there is no return⁵."

Embryonic stem cell researchers are still able to have patents on the stem cell lines created from the stem cells that are removed from human embryos. Researchers from the University of Wisconsin have allowed other researchers to use the stem cell lines they have created but have retained the "rights to any commercial products that might result from research done under the agreement⁶."

Unpromising Research at the Tax Payers' Expense

Proponents of embryonic stem cell research and human cloning claim that they will eventually cure millions of people of various ailments. But if the research was so promising then there would be no limit to the money that could be made by private investors. The reality is that embryonic stem cell research has yet to find a single cure for any human being. In the past, venture capitalists poured billions of dollars into companies practicing embryonic stem cell research. These investments have yet to pay off, so due to its lack of success, those involved with embryonic stem cell research are looking for public funding.

In California, venture capitalists, celebrities and biotechnology companies spent millions of dollars on television commercials to help pass Proposition 71 so California could take out a \$3 billion dollar loan. The loan will provide biotechnology companies and researchers involved with embryonic stem cell research with about \$300 million dollars a year for the next ten years. Other states like New Jersey, Wisconsin and New York have also announced plans to spend large amounts of tax dollars on embryonic stem cell research.

Each human being begins as a human embryo, male or female. The government should not fund research that requires the killing of living, irreplaceable human embryos. Research using stem cells from adults and umbilical cords has proven much more successful than embryonic stem cell research. Stem cells obtained from NON-embryonic sources have provided benefits to real human patients with at least 58 different diseases and conditions.

⁵Badger Herald, 12/5/03, "Appropriations bill may ban patents on human organisms" by Rachel Patzer

⁶Wired News, 9/5/01, "Stem Cell Patent Issues Resolved" by Kristen Philipkoski. Available online at <http://wired-vig.wired.com/news/medtech/0,1286,46554,00.html>