Ban Cloning Without Enron Loophole

April 24, 2002

Google Ads are provided by Google and are not selected or endorsed by Eagle Forum

We realize what a fundamental difference the 2000 election made to America when we read that the New York Times has accused President George W. Bush of having a "narrow morality." Nobody could have made such an accusation against the previous White House occupant!
What is it that makes his views narrow? Was it reminding us that "life is a creation, not a commodity" and that children are not "products to be designed and manufactured"? Was it advising us that "advances in biomedical technology must never come at the expense of human conscience"?

Was it saying that, "as we seek to improve human life, we must always preserve human dignity"? Was it warning us not to "travel without an ethical compass into a world we could live to regret"?

It really wasn't Bush's words that the New York Times found "disturbing" so much as his "black-and-white tone." Yet, most people do perceive killing in tones of black and white and, in Bush's words, "wrong" and "unethical."

Bush announced that he wants to ban human cloning, i.e., creating human embryos that are genetic replicas of adults. The controversy arises because some people assert there are two kinds of cloning: bad reproductive cloning and good experimental cloning (also called research or therapeutic cloning).

According to the National Academy of Sciences, the first step in all cloning is "nuclear transplantation" or "somatic cell nuclear transfer." This produces a cell that divides several times to produce an embryo composed of about 150 cells.

If the embryo is implanted in a woman's uterus, a baby can be born nine months later, and that's called reproductive cloning. Alternatively, the cells can be removed from the embryo to make stem cell lines for experimentation and the embryo is killed; that's called research or therapeutic cloning.

The difference between reproductive cloning and cloning for research is not scientific; it is political and rhetorical. It's only the use of the embryo that is different.

There is widespread agreement that we should ban the former, but profit-oriented lobbies have raised a big ruckus by asserting that cloning-for-research might hold promise for the treatment of Parkinson's and other diseases.

There is growing skepticism among scientists, however, about the effectiveness of research cloning and its possibility to cure diseases. Chasing pie in the sky down the cloning road would take valuable resources away from the development of more promising avenues.

Clinical tests provide far more evidence that processes to conquer disease can come from stem cells from umbilical cord blood and from adults, of which there is an almost unlimited supply.

Scientists estimate that it would take at least 50 eggs to create one viable cloned embryo, while all the other embryos would die or be killed. At that rate, getting matched tissues for 16 million Parkinson's patients would require 800 million women's eggs.

It defies all that we know about human nature to believe that, if research cloning were allowed, it would never be used for reproductive purposes. Such a rule would be impossible to enforce, even if we stationed a policeman in every laboratory.

The press is already reporting news of foreign scientists who plan to clone humans. These threats come in spite of the fact that the laboratory cloning of animals required dozens of attempts and produced spontaneous abortions and terrible abnormalities.

You don't have to have a particularly vivid imagination to recognize that President Bush was correct when he said that authorizing therapeutic cloning would lead to experimental human beings, "embryo farms," and "a society in which human beings are grown for spare body parts and children are engineered to custom specifications."

The House last year overwhelmingly (265-162) passed a good bill that would prohibit human cloning for any purpose, and would further prohibit the importation of medical therapies developed from cloning technology. S.1899 is sponsored in the Senate by Sam Brownback (R-KS) and more than two dozen other Senators, and the President has promised to sign the bill if it passes.

Strenuous efforts are currently being made to weaken Brownback's bill. Those who oppose human cloning must make sure the Senate bill passes without an Enron loophole, i.e., allowing the results of mischievous activities in foreign countries to be imported for the profit of U.S. residents.

It would defeat the whole purpose of a ban on human cloning if U.S. laboratories were allowed to experiment on clones, or use products made from clones, brought in from other countries.

The overwhelming majority of Americans agree with President Bush that "no human life should be exploited or extinguished for the benefit of another." If we are going to stop cloning before it starts, it is important for the Senate to act immediately.