

Australian Parliament legalizes embryonic cloning

SYDNEY, Australia (CNS) — Australian legislators legalized the use of embryonic cloning for research despite objections from Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

A Dec. 6 parliamentary vote lifted a four-year ban on human cloning by allowing the cloning of embryos through somatic cell nuclear transfer, commonly called therapeutic cloning.

Both the Conservative Party prime minister and the leader of the opposition Labor Party, Kevin Rudd, were opposed to the Parliament's decision.

"We lie in an age where we have slid too far into relativism. There are some absolutes in our society, and what we're talking about here is a moral absolute," said Howard.

Rudd, a Catholic from Queensland whose mother had Parkinson's disease, said he could not support a bill designed for the "single and explicit purpose of conducting of experimentation on human life."

"I am concerned with the crossing of such an ethical threshold and where it may lead in the long term," he said.

In the week leading up to the parliamentary debate, Cardinal George Pell of Sydney urged politicians to retain the ban on human cloning.

He said cloning human embryos for research will create "two classes of people — those created to live and those created to be killed."

Cardinal Pell said the bill is "alarming and misleading, and its deference to human life is limited and unprincipled."

"Human embryonic stem-cell research is leading us down a blind alley," said Cardinal Pell.

Proponents' claims that stem-cell research would lead to cures for otherwise lethal diseases exposed a "massive gap between rhetoric and reality," he said.

Although money has been spent on such research, "human embryonic stem cells have produced none of the cures foreshadowed," Cardinal Pell added.