

# Bishops' official laments Senate move

WASHINGTON - An official of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops criticized the U.S. Senate's "fixation on destructive research" after the Senate passed a bill that would provide federal funding for stem-cell research involving the destruction of human embryos.

"Many members of Congress remain dazzled by irresponsibly hyped promises of 'miracle cures' from the destruction of human embryos, although experts in the field increasingly admit that treatments from this avenue may be decades away," said Richard M. Doerflinger, deputy director of the USCCB's Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities.

Doerflinger made his comments late April 11 following an evening vote in which the Senate approved S. 5, a bill permitting destruction of human embryos in federally funded stem-cell research, by a 63-34 margin.

Maryland Senators Barbara Mikulski and Benjamin Cardin voting in favor of the measure.

Should S. 5 become law, "millions of taxpayers would be forced to promote attacks on innocent human life in the name of scientific progress," he said.

Since President George W. Bush has promised to veto the legislation, however, and its backers do not have enough votes for an override in the House or the Senate, "we expect that this terrible burden will not be placed on the American people now," Mr. Doerflinger said.

On Jan. 11 the House passed a similar measure, H.R. 3, by a vote of 253-174. The House vote was 32 votes short of a two-thirds majority needed to override a veto.

Mr. Doerflinger criticized those who continue advocating destructive research on human embryos, saying, "This debate continues to divert attention and resources away from the demonstrated therapeutic promise of morally sound research using

adult and cord blood stem cells.”

Before the House vote in January Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia, chairman of the bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities, urged legislators to “consider the fundamental moral line” they would cross if they approved the measure.

By a 70-28 vote the Senate also passed S. 30, a bill that would promote alternative ways to pursue stem-cell research without destroying human embryos, but Mr. Doerflinger said in an interview that it was uncertain whether the Democratic leadership would let that bill come to a vote in the House or, if so, what form it would take.

The USCCB favors “a lot of things in S. 30” but has reservations about a provision that would allow use of “naturally dead embryos” for stem-cell research, he said. He said there are concerns in the pro-life community about how strict the standards would be to prevent abuse of that provision.

Douglas Johnson, legislative director of the National Right to Life Committee, criticized the Democratic leadership in Congress for “political demagoguery, making claims for embryonic stem-cell research that go far beyond any evidence.”

“Not a single human patient has yet been helped by stem cells obtained by killing human embryos,” he said. “Meanwhile, many thousands of human patients have been helped with other types of stem cells, obtained in noncontroversial ways that do not require harming human embryos.”

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, praised the 34 senators who voted against funding “research that requires the destruction of human life.”

Noting that those votes are enough to prevent a veto override, he said, “Now that S. 5 is dead, we should immediately expand on adult stem-cell research that is treating people now.”

The Bush administration said in an April 10 policy statement that the president “strongly opposes” S. 5 and would veto it if it reached his desk.

“The administration believes that research on alternative sources of stem cells is extremely promising and provides robust opportunities to advance science without

compelling American taxpayers to participate in ongoing destruction of human embryos," it said.