

Bush vows veto of embryonic stem-cell bill; cloning bill defeated

WASHINGTON - The House of Representatives rejected a bill June 6 that would have allowed human cloning but passed legislation the next day that would promote stem-cell research involving the destruction of human embryos.

President George W. Bush vowed to veto the stem-cell measure, however, saying it "puts scientific research and ethical principle into conflict, rather than supporting a balanced approach that advances scientific and medical frontiers without violating moral principles."

Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, had urged the defeat of both bills in a June 6 letter to House members.

"Embryonic stem-cell research has been as disappointing in its results as it has been divisive to our society," the cardinal wrote. "Pursuit of this destructive research will almost certainly require you to embrace more and more egregious violations of moral norms in the effort to bring its 'promise' to fruition."

He said the Human Cloning Prohibition Act of 2007 was erroneously named and showed "the direction in which the embryonic stem-cell agenda is now taking us." The House defeated that bill by a 204-213 vote late June 6.

Although the legislation "may be promoted as a ban on human cloning, ... it is exactly the opposite," Cardinal Rigali wrote. "This bill ... allows unlimited cloning of human embryos for research - and then makes it a crime to transfer the embryo to a womb to allow the new human being to survive.

"Such legislation is not a partial ban on cloning, but is worse than doing nothing at all on the issue," he added.

The Stem-Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2007, approved by the House 247-176 June 7, passed the Senate April 11 by a 63-34 vote.

“Ethically sound research using nonembryonic stem cells has continued to advance, helping patients with over 70 conditions in clinical trials,” Cardinal Rigali said in his letter. “Since Congress debated this issue last summer, further evidence has emerged on the versatility of adult stem cells and on the ability of adult cells to be reprogrammed to rival the flexibility of embryonic cells.”

An article published June 7 in the international science journal *Nature* reported on research by three different groups that showed skin cells of mice could be reprogrammed back into embryonic stem cells. The new method, which the *Nature* article described as “surprisingly straightforward,” could end the need for creation and destruction of human embryos for stem-cell research.

Richard Doerflinger, deputy director of the bishops’ Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, welcomed the report, saying the advances “would be a gain for science, ethics and society.”

“Because adult cell reprogramming does not pose the moral problem of creating or destroying embryos, it may offer a way for people of all faiths and ethical backgrounds to use, subsidize and enjoy any benefits from ‘pluripotent’ stem-cell research,” he said. “Practically as well as ethically, these studies point the way toward enjoying any benefits of embryonic stem cells without their disadvantages.”

Cardinal Rigali ended his letter by asking legislators to defeat both bills “on behalf of taxpayers who should not be forced to help destroy innocent life, and on behalf of genuine progress for suffering patients.”