

EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

15 November 2006

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I rise today to place on record Family First's position on embryonic stem cell research and therapeutic cloning. Late on Tuesday 7 November 2006 the commonwealth Senate passed Senator Patterson's private member's bill to overturn the 2002 moratorium on embryonic stem cell research. I note that this a complete reversal of her position of some four years ago.

For the record, a Family First senator from Victoria, Steve Fielding, voted against the bill. The supporters of the Patterson bill (or backflip, if you like) liken embryonic stem cell research to the discovery of penicillin. Perhaps the best judge of whether the right decision was made will be the citizens living when this parliament celebrates, say, its 250th anniversary in the brave new world that our parliaments will have created.

Family First is against this expansion of research into embryonic stem cells and therapeutic cloning. Ethically, we reject the creation of human life and then harvesting from that life the cells required for the therapy of others. The medical mantra of 'do no harm' seems to have been given second place to a new mantra of 'do the maximum possible good.' How could medicine do no harm to a human embryo by harvesting cells from it and, in many cases, then destroying it? In our view creating life for the purpose of destroying it is simply wrong and never justifiable. We deplore talk of the bill enabling an aborted female child to be used as a 'mother' for a cloned embryo which is then destroyed for research, as if the two wrongs would make a right.

On a more practical level, we worry that too little research has occurred into the merits of adult or umbilical stem cell research. Embryonic stem cell research and therapeutic cloning are, in one sense, the 'easy road'. Hence, if that path is easier it is true that the financial cost of working with that particular vein of research may, in fact, be less. But, in my view, the cost is never too high when

such huge ethical considerations are at risk, especially when research, like adult stem cell research, is a very viable option. Indeed, Professor Alan Mackay-Sim of the National Adult Stem Cell Centre said:

It is probable that adult stem cell lines will render therapeutic cloning irrelevant and impractical.

We are also concerned that embryonic stem cell use can go wrong, with the cells failing to behave in the way that scientists have 'programmed' them. Embryonic stem cells remain unproven in testing on animals and have been proven to have the capacity to produce tumours in humans. To Family First those pushing for embryonic stem cell research may be seen as somewhat over-confident because underlying their push is a suggestion that they know or believe they know all there is to observe in nature, such that this research will do 'no harm'—that is the assumption.

If our view does not prevail, we urge the medical community to exercise the utmost caution and respect for the human life that they are tampering with. We urge our parliamentary colleagues in the other place to seriously weigh the arguments regarding the Hon. Bob Such's motion supporting embryonic stem cell and therapeutic cloning research, and we earnestly hope that in conscience they will join us in rejecting that motion.