

Deceptive Cloning Initiative on November Ballot in Missouri

BY Liz Townsend

Voters in Missouri will decide November 7 whether to amend the state constitution by adopting the so-called "Missouri Stem Cell Research and Cures Initiative." Proponents insist the measure is about "stem cell research" when, in fact, the initiative would allow researchers not only to lethally extract stem cells from human embryos but also "clone and kill" embryos at will.

In addition, Section 5 of the four-page-long initiative "prohibits state and local governments from withholding state funds from cloners if their institutions are eligible to receive public funds for purposes other than stem-cell-related activities," said James Cole, Missouri Right to Life general counsel. "Under the initiative, if an institution is eligible for state funds—whatever the program, be it education, health, economic development, or whatever—the legislature cannot prevent the institution from receiving state funds for cloning and taking stem cells from the unborn."

The initiative is strongly supported by pro-abortion state Auditor Claire McCaskill (D), who is running against pro-life incumbent Sen. James Talent (R). McCaskill is supported by EMILY's List, a wealthy political action committee that supports only pro-abortion female candidates who promise to oppose any limitations on abortion.

Sen. Talent said he "cannot support the initiative because I've always been opposed to human cloning and this measure would make cloning embryos a constitutional right—without regard to medical necessity or changing technology."

The campaign for the embryonic stem cell initiative has been funded almost exclusively by James and Virginia Stowers and their Stowers Institute for Medical Research in Kansas City, according to the Associated Press (AP). The Stowers had already contributed \$9.5 million by May 17, including \$4 million that was spent to collect signatures to get the initiative on the ballot, the AP reported.

The institute conducts stem cell research, and announced plans for expansion if the initiative passes, according to the Kansas City Star. "Missourians are not going to be deceived by them saying, 'We will build if, we'll put our money into Missouri if you vote to kill human life and kill human embryos,'" Sue Klein, Missouri Right to Life legislative liaison, told the Star. "Missourians will see that for what it is."

The description of the proposed constitutional amendment that will be on the ballot states that the initiative will "allow and set limitations on stem cell research, therapies, and cures" and "ban human cloning." However, a close reading of the actual amendment language shows a much different agenda.

Although it states that "No person may clone or attempt to clone a human being," the definition specifies that cloning means "to implant in a uterus or attempt to implant in a uterus anything other than the product of fertilization of an egg of a human female by a sperm of a human male for the purpose of initiating a pregnancy that could result in the creation of a human fetus, or the birth of a human being."

The qualifying words make the claim of a "cloning ban" meaningless. "It is not the process of cloning that is prohibited, but the process of implanting," said Cole. "It would not be illegal to create a clone; it would only be illegal to keep a clone alive by allowing him or her to be implanted in a mother's womb."

And since the language specifies that only implantation in a "uterus" is banned, a cloned embryo could conceivably be grown in an artificial womb and killed for research without violating the law, Cole explained.

Another section in the proposed amendment declares that no "state or local law, regulation, rule, charter, ordinance, or other governmental action" can "prevent, restrict, obstruct, or discourage any stem cell research" or "create disincentives for any person to engage in or otherwise associate with such research or therapies and cures."

"This gives researchers and businesses that use therapies from embryonic stem cells immunity from lawsuits," Cole said. "In other words, the cloning and biotech industry would have no liability under state law for the injuries that may be caused by stem cell therapies that have harmful side effects or are administered negligently."

The amendment also purports to protect women by banning the purchase or sale "for valuable consideration" of their eggs or embryos. Again, the definitions provide the true meaning of the section. "Valuable consideration" is defined as financial gain "but does not include reimbursement for reasonable costs" or any money paid by fertility clinics to the women.

"The loophole that this exclusion opens is so wide that a truck can drive through," said Cole. "It will lead to the exploitation of women for their eggs. The cloners may enter into supply contracts for human eggs with IVF clinics, so that the clinics will advertise to buy women's eggs even more aggressively than they do now and then resell them to the cloners."

Pro-lifers have begun an intense campaign to bring to truth about the initiative to Missouri voters. Rallies and educational events are being held across the state by Missouri Right to Life chapters, religious groups, and coalitions formed to fight the proposed constitutional amendment.

The initiative is "an attack on the natural moral law which God has written upon our hearts," said Catholic Archbishop Raymond L. Burke at an August 28 rally, according to the St. Louis Review. "He teaches us to safeguard and defend and foster human life from the moment of its inception to the moment of its natural death. [The initiative] denies the fundamental right to life to a whole class of human beings on the basis of their size and inability to defend themselves."

For more information on the anti-life provisions of the initiative, see Missouri Right to Life's web site at <http://www.missourilife.org/news/2006/cloning/index.html>.