

Missouri's Amendment Two

By Dave Andrusko

By now, probably every pro-lifer in America knows that Missourians narrowly passed "Amendment Two," which makes the right to clone part of the state Constitution. The loss is a bitter one—all the more so because of the layers of duplicity proponents wrapped the measure in.

Amendment Two won passage by barely 50,000 out of over 2,000,000 votes cast. While it is true that close only counts in horseshoes, it is still a remarkable accomplishment, given all the forces arrayed in favor of passage, beginning with a more than ten to one spending advantage.

The Amendment Two juggernaut enjoyed a number of significant advantages above and beyond a massive war chest. Those include:

#1. The truth gained only limited traction. The amendment was packaged as a way of safeguarding "stem cell research" from reactionary forces who couldn't see its unlimited potential.

But the real issue was never about lethally harvesting stem cells from human embryos. That was/is legal in Missouri. The hidden agenda was codifying the right to clone by encasing it in the protection of the state Constitution.

Proponents were able to seal off a real debate by clever obfuscations. For example, the technique of cloning is the same whether the human clone is dissected for stem cells or carried to term.

But by persuading large chunks of the population that only the latter was cloning—and that cloning that created a source of stem cells wasn't—supporters of Amendment Two successfully camouflaged the reality that in voting for Amendment Two the citizens of Missouri were voting for human cloning.

As one writer deftly put it, "This is like banning the killing of humans but endorsing the killing of Homo sapiens."

#2. The text of the Amendment was five pages and 2,000 words long—half the length of the United States Constitution. Thus the key was the summary ballot language that people read while voting. That language was equally misleading. Opponents took this battle to court but lost. The irony was that the judges, in effect, said the summary was no more deceptive than the petition itself!

#3. Assuming that reporters were unbiased, only a couple were able to put enough time in to understand such arcane language as "somatic cell nuclear transfer" (SCNF). Supporters of Amendment Two proudly said they endorsed SCNF at the same time they insisted the measure banned cloning. But SCNF IS cloning.

Further confusing the public, some major newspapers in the state constantly referred to the issue as one about cloned “cells” or “early cells,” instead of embryonic stem cells, or more correctly, cloned embryos killed when stem cells are harvested.

#4. Despite their best efforts, opponents had limited success helping the public understand that placing something into the state Constitution squeezes out public scrutiny and legislative oversight.

#5. The impact of actor Michael J. Fox. As most readers know, Fox taped an ad for Claire McCaskil, who was running against incumbent pro-life Missouri Senator Jim Talent. Although Fox did not specifically mention Amendment Two, when he misleadingly said Talent “opposes expanding stem cell research,” he didn’t need to. McCaskil defeated Talent by less than 26,000 votes. Fox, who has Parkinson’s disease, was a highly sympathetic spokesman.

#6. The other major figure whose support buoyed supporters of Amendment Two and confused some pro-lifers was the active, public support of former Missouri Senator Jack Danforth. Danforth described himself as pro-life, although over the years he has steadily moved away from the Movement. His message was that people could be pro-life AND pro-Amendment Two.

But anti-Amendment Two forces did many, many things well. Given the huge financial disparity (probably in the range of \$40 million to \$3 million) and the relentlessly pro-Amendment Two coverage in local, state, and national media, they had to have done an amazing job to come so agonizingly close.

#1. The television commercials that featured current and former Missouri sports figures (from teams such as members of the St. Louis Cardinals and St. Louis Rams), along with actress Patricia Heaton and actor Jim Caviezel, were extremely effective. Suddenly, it gave a public, recognizable face to those who were against Amendment Two, complete with well-thought-out reasons to oppose the amendment. The one break opponents received was that the St. Louis Cardinals were playing in the World Series and the St. Louis Rams played the Kansas City Chiefs in St. Louis the Sunday before the vote! No advertiser for any product anywhere could wish for a more targeted audience.

#2. The opposition articulated by the leadership of many mainstream religious denominations in Missouri was inspirational. To name just three, the Missouri Catholic Bishops, the Southern Baptists, and the Lutheran Church/Missouri Synod were fabulous.

#3. An effective coalition was put together of laity, clergy, and people with no religious affiliation.

#4. Feminists, including those who were pro-abortion, made the case that poorer women could and would be induced to donate eggs for cloning. Each woman who donates eggs is treated with massive dosages of hormones to induce ovulation of multiple eggs. This inevitably leads to abuses—see what happened in South Korea where a coalition of 35 groups of women have sued the South Korean government for the injuries they received.

Unfortunately, this will not be the last time heavily financed groups will attempt to mislead the public. Thus it’s invaluable to know what opponents are up against and what resources they can and should bring to the table.