



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**PROHIBITION OF HUMAN CLONING
FOR REPRODUCTION AND THE
REGULATION OF HUMAN EMBRYO
RESEARCH AMENDMENT BILL 2006**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 4 December 2006

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Pyne, Chris, MP

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Mr PYNE (Sturt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing) (9.20 pm)—I appreciate the contribution made by the member for Corio. He and I both came into parliament in 1993 and both found ourselves voting together in 2002 on very similar bills. We will be voting together again on this bill. I was part of the debate in 2002 on the embryonic stem cell research bill and the ban on human cloning bill. I debated it very vigorously. I moved a number of amendments. I called a number of divisions. I think I spoke 14 times and failed to stop embryonic stem cell research but succeeded as part of the unanimous vote of this House to ban human cloning.

At that time I threw quite a lot of effort at trying to stop embryonic stem cell research, but we failed to do so. In fact, the vote was a paltry 40-something votes against embryonic stem cell research. So on this occasion I have decided to speak only once to put my view, so as to not take the House's time at great length, and not to move any amendments. There have been a lot of people talking about moving amendments to this bill. There was feeling that an amendment should be moved that would stop the use of aborted female foetuses for the extraction of stem cells for research purposes, which I think would be a useful change to the bill.

But I feel that nothing can make this bill acceptable to me or to the House and, even if I voted in favour of such an amendment, I would still want to vote against this bill. I think this bill has many defects, not just of a technical nature but of a principled nature and a philosophical nature. We could argue about the science—many speakers have talked about the science—but this bill turns on one fundamental point, and that is when one believes human life is created and what one believes can become an embryo that will then become a human being. That is the fundamental point of this debate and to me nothing else matters.

In 2002, we were told by the scientists and the advocates that that was as far as they needed to go—that they would get from what was available at the time all the eggs that they possibly could need to create their stem cell lines. This has been whittled away one step at a time. A moratorium that was put in place eventually disappeared. The sunset clauses that had been put in place for the return of those issues to a select committee for discussion and decision about whether new embryos could be used were all whittled away—until today, in 2006, we are debating what essentially is the overturning of a unanimous vote on the banning on human cloning in this place. This is being done under the guise of the beautifully named Prohibition of Human Cloning for Reproduction and the Regulation of Human Embryo Research Amendment Bill 2006.

Make no mistake: this is about continuing to move the boundaries of what we as human beings regard as acceptable in the research and science area. In 2002, we were told that they had reached the threshold; we were told that, if they went any further, they would be moving into the boundaries of what was immoral and unethical. As the member for Corio said, only four short years later we are debating those boundaries yet again and being asked to push them further out. I believe that, for some people—those who see no moral or ethical boundaries in science regarding this debate and what is or is not acceptable in the world today—the boundaries are limitless and eventually the next boundary will need to be pushed out.

This bill potentially allows aborted human female foetuses to be used for the extraction of cells. I am a layman, but I would have thought that was a boundary we were not going to cross. But we have crossed it in this bill. I am not opposed to stem cell research per se. Like many other members who have spoken on this bill, I am in favour—in fact, enthusiastic—about adult stem cell research. It presents us with none of the moral or ethical dilemmas of embryonic stem cell research and certainly not those associated with therapeutic cloning. It is actually bringing about achievements as we speak. The University of Manchester has developed stem cells from adult bone marrow that are regenerating into spinal discs, potentially saving Great Britain \$5 billion in health costs a year.

However, I agree with the member for Melbourne that this debate is not about whether there is an alternative for us to fall back on. This bill is not a debate about whether we prefer one form of scientific research to another. This bill is about whether we believe that an embryo should be created for human life or whether there should be two classes of embryo: one created for death and one created for human life. So, even though I am in favour of adult stem cell research and against embryonic stem cell research, to me the debate is not about that. It is

not about alternatives, as the member for Melbourne correctly pointed out—although I disagree with his end conclusion, because he is supporting this bill. This debate is about whether somatic cell nucleic transfer is not possibly a human life. That is what the debate turns on and that is what most people are arguing about. I reject the notion that somatic cell nucleic transfer is not capable of human life. I reject the notion that, just because we call something by a different name, it is not the same, as we understand it.

I understand that this method of science creates an embryo. It has the potential for human life. It should not be allowed to be experimented upon and it should not be treated differently from other embryos. For the first time in our history, we are allowing scientists to create two types of human beings: one for destruction and death and the other earmarked for life. To me, respect for human life is the central component of a civilised society. It is the difference between civilisation and lack of civilisation. In 2002, I said that we were on the slippery slope. I do not believe that we are on the slippery slope any more; if we pass this bill, which I fear we will, we will be at the bottom of the abyss when in this House and as a society we talk about our respect for human life. The slippery slope will have been a paradise when compared with the abyss that we will allow ourselves to slide into by supporting therapeutic cloning or embryonic stem cell research as outlined in this bill.

I respect the fact that many of my colleagues do not agree with me and many of my constituents do not agree with me. However, my constituency elected me to make decisions based on what I thought was the best judgement, and for 14 years I have tried to bring that judgement to this House. All of my colleagues are making the same judgement. I disagree with those who will vote for this bill. I disagreed with those in the Senate who voted for it. I think it is too easy and too convenient to make the decision to vote yes to this bill; I think it is harder to make the decision to vote no to the bill. But I will be voting no to the bill. I humbly disagree with my colleagues who are voting yes to it. I hope that as many of my colleagues as possible will vote to support human life and not to create two different classes of embryos in this society—which would hardly be the slippery slope but would now be the abyss.