

Pro-Lifers Decry Stem Cell Order

✖ **March 10, 2009** – President Barack Obama further alienated social conservatives yesterday when he signed an executive order lifting restrictions on embryonic stem cell research. Pro-life leaders called the move immoral and unnecessary, saying adult stem cell research shows more immediate promise.

“President Obama’s executive order shows disrespect for the deeply held moral convictions of tens of millions of Americans by compelling taxpayers to fund this deadly experimentation,” Family Research Council President Tony Perkins said in a statement Monday.

“The research that President Obama supports is not sound science and will destroy human life,” he added. “There is great potential in this country for research and procedures that will cure many diseases and allow us to maintain our ethical standards.”

By signing the order Monday at the White House, Obama overturned policies implemented in 2001 by President George W. Bush that restricted federal funding of embryonic stem cell research to a small number of stem lines created before Aug. 9, 2001. Obama said the ban forced “a false choice between sound science and moral values.”

“In this case, I believe the two are not inconsistent,” Obama said. “As a person of faith, I believe we are called to care for each other and work to ease human suffering. I believe we have been given the capacity and will to pursue this research-and the humanity and conscience to do so responsibly.”

Concerned Women for America President Wendy Wright called embryonic stem cell research a “destructive and outdated method that has become the holy grail to political and

scientific activists who week no moral restraints on their work.”

She said claims that fertility clinics discard thousands of embryos each year are “absolutely false.”

“Most of the 400,000 embryos in fertility clinics are wanted by their parents and are awaiting implantation and the welcoming arms of their families,” she said. “The claim betrays an attitude that these embryos are government property and can be confiscated and used for experiments. It’s an example of the hype and manipulation advocates of embryonic stem cell research have used to pursue their politics.”

Because embryonic stem cells can morph into almost any cell in the body, proponents say the research may lead to cures for diabetes, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease. But in order to extract the stem cells, the embryos have to be destroyed. Pro-life advocates say choosing between the two types of research is unnecessary because adult stem cells show more promise.

“Many people out there in the public realm really believe that embryonic stem cell research is much more advanced than it really is,” said Mark Mostert, Ph.D., co-director of the Institute for the study of Disability and Bioethics at Regent University.

“Right now we have not one cure that has come out of embryonic stem cell research. We have had many breakthroughs using other kinds of stem cells. ... If we have great promise and great strikes in one area, on the face of it, it seems unreasonable to want to go the embryonic stem cell route, which is fraught with many ethical issues.”

A neuroscientist who is working on a book about the promise of adult stem cells agrees. “If we understand it well, we can really put the embryonic stem cells back on the shelf,” said Dr. Christian Drapeau, whose forthcoming book is tentatively

titled *The Stem Cell Theory of Healing, Regeneration and Repair*. "Adult stem cells is where all the promise is."

He said adult stem cells, too, can morph into other cell types and are routinely used around the world for treatment. But the invitro methods used to grow embryonic stem cells did not work well with adult stem cells.

"The conclusion was that they are lesser stem cells," Drapeau told *Charisma*. "But what was discovered in the years after is that adult stem cells have virtually the same ability as embryonic stem cells, but in the body, not in the test tube. If on their own they go to the liver, they proliferate and become liver cells in the liver.

"It's when we try to make adult stem cells behave as if they are embryonic stem cells, then it doesn't work. But when we use adult embryonic stem cells according to protocols designed for adult stem cells, the result at the end is actually better, and that is now becoming overwhelming."

Advocates of embryonic stem cell research, however, say it is unclear which stem cells will ultimately lead to the most important medical advances, so both should be studied.

Obama said he could not guarantee that the research would lead to treatments and cures. "But I can promise that we will seek them actively, responsibly, and with the urgency required to make up for lost ground," he said.

The president said his administration would develop strict guidelines to prevent human cloning, which he said is "dangerous, profoundly wrong, and has no place in our society, or any society."

Anticipating Obama's decision, the National Institute of Health began drafting guidelines expected to require that the cells being used for research are derived with proper informed consent from the donors, the Associated Press (AP) reported.

But it remains unclear whether scientists will be allowed to use federal dollars to create human embryos for the purpose of stem cell research. To prevent that, Perkins is encouraging Congress to renew the Dickey-Wicker Amendment, which will forbid taxpayer funding of the creation of human embryos solely for their destruction. The law is debated every year and has typically been upheld.

Obama's reversal of Bush's stem cell policy is the latest in a string of blows to pro-life advocates. Within the first days of taking office, Obama repealed the Mexico City Policy, which had prevented taxpayer dollars from being used to fund international organizations that perform or promote abortions abroad.

Obama administration officials said the president is also moving to rescind a federal "right of conscience" rule that blocks federal funding of healthcare facilities that don't allow their employees to bow out of medical procedures they object to on moral grounds, the AP reported. Some abortion advocates claim the rule is unlawful because it could prevent "life-saving treatment" such as blood transfusions.