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Cloning and Stem-Cells: The Fight for Human Dignity

High above the floor of the chambers of the Missouri Senate is inscribed the following, "free and fair discussion will ever be found the firmest friend to truth." Though it is perhaps the nature of legislatures to argue, at the end of the day we realize the wisdom of our founding fathers in setting up a system where ideas proposed to become law must stand up to the light of free and open discussion. It is in the process of open debate that half-truths, innuendos and misconceptions can be revealed and refuted.

As we approach the beginning of the legislative session in January, a battle is brewing over the issue of human cloning in Missouri. I will co-sponsor a bill that seeks to ban this procedure that pushes society across the invisible ethical line that separates science that promotes human dignity from science that demeans it.

With perhaps no other issue is the opportunity for "free and fair" discussion as desperately needed. This open debate is critical since discussions of cloning inevitably raise issues involving embryonic stem cell research. Fundamentally, the purpose of cloning is to provide a source of human embryos from which these valuable stem-cells can be harvested. This harvesting in turn inevitably destroys the living embryo, raising cries of protest from those committed to defending the life of these tiny human beings. On the other side, we have some in the research community and their allies in government making bold claims that through this research the cure for human illness is within our grasp. People, they claim, will rise from wheelchairs, Alzheimer's patients will remember and a host of other ailments will be cured.

Two weeks ago I had the opportunity to sit in on a rare discussion on cloning and stem-cell research where experts from both sides of this debate put their case on the line, defended their positions and took questions from a group of legislators. I could not be more pleased with the results. As one who opposes human cloning in all its forms, last week's debate made clear of the fact that the science surrounding stem-cells strongly supports real caution.

In future columns I will be addressing the science on some of the main points of contention in the stem-cell debate in an attempt to shed light on this subject. These points include whether or not cloning creates human life, whether Missouri will suffer irreparable economic loss if we ban embryonic stem-cell research, and whether non-controversial adult stem-cell research is medially promising. I believe the science strongly supports the pro-life position I have taken. If "free and fair discussion" is truth's firmest friend then healthy debate on this subject will be valuable for all of Missouri.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please feel free to contact me at (573) 751-8793 or by email at delbertscott@senate.state.mo.us.