



UNITED STATES SENATOR ★ SERVING THE CITIZENS OF IDAHO

LARRY CRAIG

[HTTP://CRAIG.SENATE.GOV/PRESS/](http://craig.senate.gov/press/)

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
July 20, 2006

Dan Whiting (202) 224-8078
Sid Smith (208) 342-7985

“Stem-ulating” Debate
by Senator Larry Craig

When I think of a boundary, the first thing that comes to mind is an old, barbed-wire fence, like the ones I had to help my dad fix on our family ranch when I was a boy. But the more I think about that fence, the more I realize how slippery the concept of a boundary can be. If only every border could be as easily seen and touched as that old fence, life would be a lot easier. Unfortunately, that’s not always the case.

Boundaries can take on as many forms as the imagination can conjure. Whether they are physical or philosophical, boundaries challenge the mind. Ethical boundaries are no less difficult. Recently in the Senate, we were asked to reexamine an important ethical line regarding stem cells and medical research. Like many issues that come before us, reaching a decision on whether to support or oppose the President’s restrictions on stem cell research was not easy and took a great deal of consideration.

Research on stem cells holds a great deal of potential, and without question, this potential is very exciting. Stem cells are a unique kind of cells that can – with their ability to reproduce and form into many different kinds of cells – direct tissue growth to meet the body’s needs. They are found in varying forms throughout our lifecycle: in embryos, umbilical cords, bone marrow, and elsewhere.

Scientists have already found ways to harness the regenerative power of stem cells taken from adults. For example, stem cells found in the bone marrow of a healthy adult are commonly transplanted into a cancer patient with lifesaving results.

In recent years, researchers uncovered a method for extracting stem cells from days-old human embryos. These stem cells are pluripotent—different from adult stem cells, since they can reproduce nearly any cell found in the body. Scientists hope that pluripotent cells may one day allow us to regrow nerve and other tissue that adult stem cells cannot. We could then apply this knowledge to reverse the damage of spinal cord or brain injuries, and combat diseases such as Parkinson’s or Alzheimer’s. At least, that’s the theory. At this point, embryonic stem cell research has a long way to go before it yields any cures to diseases or injuries.

What is troubling is that stem cells extracted from embryos with current techniques result in the destruction of an embryo—a potential human life. However, recent advances in creating pluripotent

[MORE]

CRAIG Page 2 – “Stem-ulating” Debate

stem cells avoid the destruction of embryos. Therefore, I strongly supported S.2754, a bill authored by Senators Santorum and Specter, that will provide funding and research for these alternative methods. Should they prove successful, we could reap all the benefits of stem cell research without crossing the ethical boundary of destroying a developing human life.

I could not support H.R. 810, which would have overturned the President’s policy that prevents taxpayer dollars from paying for stem cell research requiring the continuing destruction of human embryos. Given the current state of embryonic stem cell science, and the emergence of alternative, and equally promising sources of stem cells, it is a line that I think we ought not cross if we can avoid it.

Just like that fence on the old ranch, we have reached an important barrier in the stem cell debate. The grass indeed looks green on the other side, as stem cell research could yield great benefits to the human race, greatly easing the suffering of many. It is my hope and belief, however, that science can help us reach that promised land without crossing solemn moral and ethical lines.