

Castle Makes Final Push to Urge President Bush to Sign His Stem Cell Research Bill as Senate Prepares to Debate Bill Next Week -- July 13, 2006

Washington, D.C. -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle, author of H.R. 810, The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, one of the bills to be debated on the Senate floor next week, sent a letter to President Bush today by hand, strongly urging him to reconsider his veto threat. Representative Castle, who was turned down for a meeting with the President on this issue last week, once again stressed the importance of the legislation for the millions of American patients who stand to benefit from the research. Castle attached to the letter a copy of his legislation with additional comments and information sheets addressing the scientific and ethical concerns of the President with H.R. 810.

The text of the letter is copied below, and a text of the fact sheets is attached to this release.

July 13, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C.

Mr. President,

I am writing to express my great disappointment with regards to your decision to veto H.R. 810, The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, and your rejection of my request to meet with you concerning this matter. The day after your lead strategist, Karl Rove, announced you would veto my legislation, I received a letter from your office stating that a meeting on this issue would not be possible. I hope that you will reconsider these decisions. I believe it is critical to make a

monumental decision like this based on the facts and in this letter I'd like to outline these facts for you. First, with regards to H.R. 810, The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act -- I wrote this legislation in consultation with our nation's leading scientists, ethicists, physicians, patient groups and research universities to mirror the policy you established in 2001. This legislation does NOT allow funding for the creation or destruction of embryos. This is already outlawed in the annual Dickey-Wicker Amendment that is attached as a rider to the Labor HHS Education Appropriations Bill. Rather it allows federally funded research on stem cell lines derived ethically according to the following principles:

- The stem cells were derived from human embryos that have been donated from in vitro fertilization clinics, were created for the purposes of fertility treatment, and were in excess of the clinical need of the individuals seeking such treatment. Prior to the consideration of embryo donation and through consultation with the individuals seeking fertility treatment, it was determined that the embryos would never be implanted in a woman and would otherwise be discarded.
- The individuals seeking fertility treatment donated the embryos with written informed consent and without receiving any financial or other inducements to make the donation.

As you can see this legislation for the first time aims to end the "Wild West" of stem cell research by establishing an ethical construct. It also does not expand funding for embryonic stem cell research. I think the most critical aspect of this policy is that the embryos we are discussing are blastocysts, created for the purposes of in vitro fertilization, developed into a few hundred cells, no bigger than the tip of a pencil, and which are spare or in excess of clinical need and in every single case are slated for medical waste. In keeping with your principles, the "life and death" decision has been made - the donors have decided to discard these embryos and they will be discarded. Why not use the stem cells we can derive from these embryos, which will never become life, to help the millions of people suffering across the United States?

Many myths surround the science of embryonic stem cells and that is why I believe it is so critical to present the facts accurately. It is one reason I am so very careful never ever to promise that embryonic stem cells will absolutely lead to cures - I always say that leading scientists believe these stem cells are our best hope for cures and treatments. But I also believe those who oppose embryonic stem cell research must also abide by the facts and not make blatantly scientifically false statements such as adult stem cells can do everything embryonic stem cells can do. That is just plain wrong. Adult stem cells are not better, they do not have the same ability to turn into pluripotent stem cells and they are extremely limited in what they can do. It concerns me greatly when I hear members of the White House staff or other representatives make those claims.

Finally, it is important to point out that S. 2754, "The Alternative Pluripotent Stem Cell Therapies Act," that you plan to sign into law, while you veto the only piece of legislation that expands the most effective method available, is wrought with difficulties. From concerns by your own Bioethics Council over the ethics of some of these proposals, such as single cell bioposy or altered nuclear transfer, to the very real fact that these alternative sources are highly speculative and not being conducted in human models, it is clear that this bill is nothing more than political cover for those who do not stand with the majority of the American people in backing true stem cell research. I have attached the following documents, which I hope you will review, as you reconsider your veto threat on H.R. 810, the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act:

- Copy of H.R. 810, The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act Scientific Analysis of the Limitations of Adult Stem Cell Research "Facts on Stem Cells" written by Dr. John Gearhart of Johns Hopkins University "In the Name of Politics" written by former U.S. Senator John Danforth "Harnessing Stem Cells" written by Dr. George Daley of Children's Hospital in Boston
- Chapter 11 from Senator Orrin Hatch's book "Square Peg"

I welcome a discussion of this issue at your earliest possible convenience.

Sincerely,

Michael N. Castle

Member of Congress