

Dear Senator:

Thank you for your email response to my email regarding stem cell research. In your note, you stated the following:

"Scientists tell us that human embryonic stem cells have tremendous potential to be used in a variety of applications to improve human health."

I wholeheartedly agree! But then you went on to say:

"Some have ethical concerns about embryonic stem cell research because human embryos have to be destroyed in order to extract the stem cells to study them. Many Americans believe that embryos - even in the early stages of development - represent human life."

I'd like to clarify, sir, and take those comments a step further. While it may be claimed that an embryonic cell cluster that lay frozen in a petri dish "represents" a potential life, isolated from the nurturing womb of a mother these cells have no chance to constitute a potential human life. Thus, unless you know of some secret, magical petri dishes capable of carrying these frozen embryos to term and giving birth, or tens of thousands of women lining up each year to volunteer their uteruses, your argument fails.

You continue:

"After careful consideration to both the science and the ethics of the issue, in August 2001 President Bush announced that for the first time federal funds would be used to support research on human embryonic stem cells. This research will be carefully regulated and limited to existing stem-cell lines where life and death decisions have already been made. This allows for the exploration of the promise and potential of stem-cell research without crossing a fundamental moral line of providing taxpayer funding that would sanction or encourage further destruction of human embryos that have the potential for life."

Again, Senator, there was no "life and death" decision ever made nor any moral line crossed. Absent implantation, there was no chance for life, thus there could be no death either. The same is true in the case of frozen embryos in IVF clinics, where there are currently 400,000 frozen embryos awaiting disposition. A few - a very few - will become implanted in the wombs of adoptive mothers. To date, there have been fewer than 100 of these "snowflake" children. We can rejoice in the knowledge that such things are not only possible, but reality. But even if embryonic adoption were to multiply tenfold, the vast majority of the frozen embryonic samples would still be destroyed along with the hopes of those who so desperately need your help.

The fact is that 25,000 to 40,000 excess frozen embryos are discarded every year. These not only "represent" 25,000 to 40,000 squandered opportunities to convert biohazard waste material into stem cell lines that could yield medical miracles, they are *in fact* squandered opportunities. A true "pro-life" tenet would encourage that these cells be transformed; that they not become trash, but treatment!

I am aware of the President's policies established in 2001. However, at that time Mr. Bush believed that there were in excess of 60 embryonic stem cell lines available through the NIH. The NIH has now conceded that only about 11 of those lines are sufficiently free of contaminants to be suitable for eventual human clinical testing. This is also why I was particularly dismayed to hear the President's most recent comments in his State of the Union address. His suggestion that American medical researchers would create embryos for the specific purpose of experimentation or growing body parts was an outrageous insinuation and a direct insult to, if not an assault upon, those whose life's work is to heal. Or perhaps there are alternative explanations: Perhaps the President of the United States is simply too removed from the essence of the discussion. Perhaps he just doesn't get it. Perhaps he knows no other path than to pander to and incite extremists. In any case, I urge you to take a more intelligent approach and reconsider your concurrence with Mr. Bush's unsound policy.

I am not alone in my beliefs, Senator. Polls indicate Missourians support of embryonic stem cell research in political landslide magnitude. The overwhelming majority of Missourians would be delighted to see you join forces with Senators Spector and Harkin in a bi-partisan effort to remedy bad policy spawned from fundamentally flawed data. I urge you to support federal funding for research of additional embryonic stem cell lines, which could be readily created from existing frozen embryos that have no chance whatsoever for developing into "potential human life."

While stem cell research is indeed a matter of life and death, it is so for our ill and injured who suffer, not for frozen cells in petri dishes.