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Yes on Prop 2: Don't let stem cells go to waste

Opinion

Among the many reasons to repeal Michigan's ban on embryonic stem cell research, perhaps the strongest is this: The ban doesn't preserve life. Instead, it wastes unwanted embryos that could save and improve lives. The ban also stalls scientific exploration for life-giving cures.

A repeal of the ban would enable researchers to stop discarding the unwanted embryos of couples undergoing fertility treatments. It would send a signal that the world's top researchers in this area can do their work in Michigan, giving the state an opportunity to benefit economically from this pioneering biomedical science, and perhaps to be the place where remedies are finally discovered for some of the most menacing diseases and physical conditions.

Michigan voters should say yes to Proposal 2 on the Nov. 4 ballot to open up the state to this tremendous opportunity. They should say yes to put Michigan researchers in the hunt to solve heretofore incurable diseases.

The argument for Proposal 2 really comes down to common sense.

Michigan's embryonic stem cell ban is among the most restrictive in the country at a time when 40 other states have embraced this research.

Because of the ban, unwanted embryos are thrown away, and with them goes all the scientific potential they hold.

While research on adult stem cells has yielded some important breakthroughs, most scientists believe they don't have as much promise or flexibility as embryonic cells. So we're missing out in the Great Lakes State. And for what reason? At what cost?

One clear loss is the departure of some prominent researchers from the University of Michigan -- where stem cell research is the most vigorous -- because of the ban. The other is the lack of

federal funds, which are likely to increase in the next administration, since both presidential candidates view stem cell research more favorably than does George W. Bush.

The greatest cost, of course, is to the pursuit of science. Michigan is where Jonas Salk, developer of the polio vaccine, did his important early work. It has a robust biomedical infrastructure ready to explore the potential of embryonic stem cells.

Proposal 2 would have been better with some provision built in for the possibility of state regulation of this research. Instead, it has a blanket ban on restrictions. But that doesn't preclude the Legislature from seeking another constitutional change if that appears warranted.

But passage of Proposal 2 would not bring a parade of scientific horror stories. Federal regulations and institutional codes of ethics prevent bizarre experimentation. You can't buy or sell embryos. None would be created specifically for research. And obviously, no one could be forced to participate.

Michigan voters should say yes on Proposal 2, and embrace the state's scientific future, on Nov. 4.