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## **Stem-cell law**

*State's research barrier illogical and harmful*

Michigan's severe restrictions on embryonic stem-cell research defy logic, and threaten to push the state's studies in this field to the scientific backwaters.

As it stands, surplus embryos created in Michigan for in vitro fertilization procedures can be, and are, discarded legally. But those same embryos, which hold much potential value for human medicine because of their versatility, are off-limits to the state's research laboratories.

Is it any wonder then that some who've been consistent members of the pro-life community believe robust embryonic stem-cell research not only should be legal, but the government should fund it?

Put U.S. Rep. Dale E. Kildee in that camp. The life-long Catholic, with a 42-year record opposing abortion, has voted twice this year for legislation that would ease federal restrictions on funding for stem-cell studies involving human embryos produced in fertility clinics.

While Kildee has taken no position on Michigan House bills that would lift the limits on embryonic stem-cell research, that principally reflects caution, because he's not familiar with the legislation introduced in April by Rep. Andy Meisner, D-Ferndale. For all intents and purposes, however, Kildee and Meisner are on the same page, unable in good conscience to forbid science that could lead to medical miracles when the crux of the state restrictions lack a rational basis.

It also puts Michigan in a minority of five states hamstringing this pioneering inquiry, while others are investing heavily. As a result, our plans to become a national leader in the life sciences - which could produce an economic boom - are being undermined. Researchers potentially eligible for millions in grants for embryonic stem-cell study in California or Illinois are threatened in Michigan with fines and prison if they undertake the same work.

That said, the economic gains from removing the hurdles to embryonic stem-cell study wouldn't be sufficient if something tangible was sacrificed as a result. But with many leftover embryos in fertility clinics destined to be destroyed regardless, preventing their use for life-enhancing research is beyond pointless.

Indeed, using the stem cells derived from them to possibly produce cures for Parkinson's and other degenerative diseases, or to repair body parts, such as a damaged spinal cord, is morally inspiring. Logically, therefore, Michigan has no case for maintaining a legal barrier to scientific study that could benefit mankind enormously.

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