



Everything Michigan

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Reopen debate on stem-cell research

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We welcome the debate that took place in a legislative committee hearing in Lansing this week on the benefits of lifting the state's restrictive ban on embryonic stem-cell research.

Amazingly, this is only the first time legislation such as this has received a public hearing in Michigan.

Given the potential power and significance of this technology, a public debate should have taken place a long time ago.

Some say chances are slim that the three-bill package, which would expand the reach of this type of research, will go far. Nonetheless, we call on lawmakers to review all the facts -- particularly the promise this research may offer -- instead of once again shelving the issue.

Both sides were passionately represented in this week's hearing before the House Health Policy Committee.

An Ann Arbor resident, who is paralyzed from the chest down, urged lawmakers not to make stem-cell research a "political football." Sitting in his wheelchair, the man said he is hoping for a cure that research on embryonic stem cells could offer. Scientists have said that, in the future, it may be possible to create from stem cells the kind of cells that would regenerate damaged spinal tissue.

Lobbyists who oppose abortion also testified before the committee.

A couple from Marshall appeared with their young son, who was born after they obtained a frozen embryo from a fertility clinic and then had it implanted. They claim that using embryonic stem cells from fertility clinics for research would be tantamount to taking human life.

Frozen embryos are typically discarded, ending whatever kind of life that material might have offered. But using them in research, which would entail destroying the embryo to obtain the necessary cells, could provide a way for life to go forward.

Researchers say these young, undifferentiated cells could one day be used to create medications and

treatments to deal with a range of conditions. There is the potential for destroyed heart muscle to be regenerated, for the pancreas to be jump-started to produce insulin, for the tremors of Parkinson's disease to cease.

Thus far, embryonic stem cells have not been of much medical value. And it is possible that their potential will never be realized. Should research not proceed?

That question has become mired in politically loaded discussions.

As a state, we need to move beyond the politics of the issue to a decision based on the greater good.

And, if we're going to do that, we need lawmakers with the gumption to act decisively.

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