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Editorial

Proposal 2: Michigan needs to join states allowing research on embryonic stem cells

The politicians who claim they are against stem cell research and that they oppose Proposal 2 because they are right-to-life are being disingenuous ... or at least they are being inconsistent.

Prop. 2 on the Nov. 4 ballot would allow scientists to use excess embryos created at in-vitro fertility clinics, with the written consent of the parents who sought fertility treatment, as a source of stem cells for research into cures for diseases and disabilities. Each attempt to produce a child through this process results in the creation of 30 to 40 leftover embryos. Although some may be stored for future children, the majority of these will end up being thrown away as medical waste.

Many politicians have been quick to proclaim their opposition to Proposal 2 based on them previously taking a right-to-life stance on the abortion issue. Yet, there has been no movement in Lansing, and none in Washington, to ban in-vitro fertilization. And that is the process really that creates the excess embryos which will eventually be destroyed, not stem cell research.

Right-to-Life itself, the organization, gains points at least for consistency because it opposes both stem cell research and in-vitro fertilization. The politicians don't, because there is nothing morally superior about letting embryos be destroyed by being thrown in the dumpster rather than being used for research. Still, we wouldn't expect politicians to try to ban in-vitro fertilization because it would create a huge outcry and be terribly unfair to childless couples who just want to have their own children.

State law itself is inconsistent. Research on embryonic stem cells is already allowed and being conducted here. But the way existing state law is written means the stem cells have to be drawn from embryos out of state.

Apparently, its OK for embryos to die in dumpsters and out of state, but if it happens here for research, some scientist could face 10 years in jail and a \$10 million fine.

Meanwhile, this political game play is standing in the way of highly promising research to find cures for a long list of conditions including paralysis, cancer, diabetes and Parkinson's disease. Further, Michigan's world class research facilities are hampered in their efforts to find treatments for serious, painful and life-threatening maladies.

Perhaps even worse, Michigan — which owes much of its prosperity in days gone by to scientists, engineers and inventors, some of the world's brightest minds — has hung out the "no research wanted" shingle by threatening scientists with massive penalties should they step across the line while doing their jobs.

Is it any wonder Michigan's efforts to create a "Life Sciences Corridor" have met with minimal success?

Voters need to approve Proposal 2 by voting **YES**. There is no way to know exactly what promise this area of research holds until scientists are allowed to move ahead with the work.

Researchers say embryonic stem cell research is the area that holds the greatest promise for new cures. Yes, there are other forms of stem cell research — from umbilical cord stem cells, adult stem cells and so-called reprogrammed pluripotent stem cells. But when the researchers themselves say these alternatives do not work as well, are prone to cancer or other side effects, and have other disadvantages, we have to believe them rather than their non-scientific critics.

Further, the criticisms raised by the opponents of Proposal 2 appear to hold no water. For one, nothing in Proposal 2, and no apparent effects from it, would dedicate taxpayer money to stem cell research. Criticisms that the proposal would not strengthen the current ban on cloning are irrelevant. Michigan law already outlaws cloning — although we can think of no reason why — and that would remain in effect.

Michigan is one of only a handful of states that restrict stem cell research — which include Arkansas, Louisiana, Minnesota and North and South Dakota. It is time Michigan joined the majority of states in letting research move forward to find cures for real, serious and debilitating diseases.