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Stem cell lies

BY JACK LESSENBERRY

With the exception of the presidential election itself, there is nothing more important on the Michigan ballot this November than Proposal 2, the one allowing embryonic stem cell research. Whatever your politics, you simply must vote yes. Not supporting this amendment is insanely irrational and stupid.

"Embryonic stem cell research has the power to bring hope to the sick. It holds the promise of new treatments and cures for a long list of devastating diseases ... and it can provide a major economic stimulus to Michigan's lagging economy."

That's not me talking. That is Dr. John "Joe" Schwarz, Republican, physician, strong McCain supporter and former congressman from Battle Creek. He wrote those words in a column for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers' *Hometownlife.com* last week. Schwarz is a conservative and is a practicing Roman Catholic. But he is smart, tells the truth and knows this is about our future. He knows that if we fail to pass this, it will not only mean we are at a medical disadvantage. It will mean we are dooming ourselves to become a scientific backwater.

Which means we lose any hope of attracting the well-paying jobs of the future. The jobs Michigan, the state with the highest unemployment rate in the nation, desperately needs.

Schwarz understands economics. His estimate is that — at a minimum — embryonic stem cell research would add at least 8,000 new jobs and half a billion dollars in salaries statewide. So if the fanatics who oppose Prop. 2 succeed in defeating it, everyone with a brain ought to look for the nearest entrance ramp to southbound I-75.

This has nothing to do with "killing babies." What embryonic stem cell research does is to take early-stage embryos that otherwise would be destroyed by fertility clinics, and study their stem cells, which are, at that stage, capable of great modification. They may be able to help replace damaged and destroyed and diseased cells of all kinds.

No one would be forced to donate embryos. The only way the scientists would get them is if the parents grant permission. Not one of these embryos would ever have become a baby, or even a fetus. Nor are they created for research purposes; they are merely leftovers, destined to be thrown away.

How could anyone oppose using them for potentially lifesaving research instead? Simple: Religious fanaticism. The same impulse that made the Taliban destroy the lives of women in Afghanistan. And the nuts are pouring money into an effort to defeat Prop. 2.

They call their group MI-CAUSE, which stands for Michigan Citizens Against Unrestricted Science and Experimentation. Last week, curious how they would justify asking Michigan to turn this down, I interviewed their spokesman, David Doyle.

Now I can have a certain amount of respect for someone who thinks that meddling with nature is against God's law.

Such a person would, if honest, oppose fertility clinics themselves, and probably, if consistent, penicillin.

That wasn't Doyle's position, however; nor is honest religious opposition reflected in MI-CAUSE's advertising.

He just lied, as does their advertising. Openly, brazenly, lied about what this would do. They claim that this will cost Michigan money. The fact is that it doesn't mandate one penny of tax dollars; instead it will bring money into the state. When I asked Doyle about that he merely blustered and tried to talk over me.

MI-CAUSE's advertising claims that this research opens the door to human cloning. Nothing could be further from the truth. Human cloning is already strictly illegal in Michigan, and this does nothing to change that.

They also claim it provides for "unregulated and unrestricted experimentation on human embryos." That's an equally big whopper. The amendment says that the only embryos that can be used for research are those less than two weeks old. It makes it strictly illegal for anyone, anywhere, to sell or buy embryos. And it says the only embryos that can be used are those that are freely donated and were going to be thrown away otherwise.

By the way, if you are thinking of something that looks like a baby, think again. We are talking about a ball of cells not much larger than the period at the end of this sentence.

Nevertheless, the forces of darkness are trying to stir up conspiracy theories to distract voters from the real issue. In one piece of printed nonsense, MI-CAUSE luridly talks of efforts in Great Britain to create embryos that are part human, part cow. Give me a break.

The opponents of Prop. 2 are the worst kind of cynics. They are betting we will fall for their garbage.

Let's stand with every great scientist who these kinds of people made suffer, and prove them wrong.

Good night, Johnny: Sen. John McCain, whose style is classic ready-fire-oops!-aim must have been something to watch on the shooting range at Annapolis, right after the Civil War. But we now know he is indeed capable of uniting both parties, in horror over his reckless and impetuous decisions. Democrats and, well, intelligent people of all kinds have been aghast since he revealed his choice for vice president, the scarily unqualified, arrogantly ambitious and deeply weird Hockey Mom from Hell.

Last week, it was the Republicans' turn to be johnnied. After insisting that he could win Michigan, McCain's campaign suddenly pulled out of the state, effectively conceding it to Barack Obama. Why? Well, McCain's erratic and probably doomed campaign is running short of money.

The economy made it steadily less likely he could win here. Yet openly pulling out of a key state more than a month before the election is just plain dumb for many reasons. It casts the scent of death over the entire campaign. That may well turn out to be more damaging than the impact of a few more workers in Florida and a few more TV spots in Ohio.

Party leaders in Michigan reacted with what you might call barely controlled rage. They are now going to have big problems motivating their voters to show up and support the rest of the ticket.

McCain's decision to cut and run gives Democrats a much better shot at beating Joe Knollenberg in Oakland County and the knuckle-dragging Tim Walberg in south central Michigan. It also means Republicans have virtually no chance to win back the lower house of the Legislature.

To be sure, it may well have made sense for McCain to concentrate more on other states, but the way to do that was to shift resources gradually, without ever admitting that you are giving up.

What we've seen now are two examples of how the man who would be the oldest new president in history makes decisions. Plus, we now know exactly who would replace him if he dies: Someone grasping and arrogantly ignorant. Someone who hasn't a clue as to what are the limits of the job she wants, or what the Constitution is all about.

So whatever you do, damn it, vote. And drag a slacker or two to the polls with you, after you explain the facts of life to them. The country you save just might be your own.