

September 21, 2008

Embryonic stem cell research must continue

EDITORIAL BOARD

On your election ballot this Nov. 4 will be, for some voters, a more difficult choice than their man for the presidency: whether to expand embryonic stem cell research in Michigan. The Muskegon Chronicle endorses State Proposal 2, believing it to be in the best interests of society, even as we recognize that voting "YES" will prove an agonizing choice to make for many persons of deep faith.

On balance, however, we side with those who believe expanding research opportunities within this promising field will result in untold benefits for the living and aged, such as the relief of pain and cures for the worst diseases and illnesses known to mankind.

Shackling science from the pursuit of knowledge will never lead to the conquering of those afflictions that burden so many.

To those who might feel this is a step too far for science and humanity, we think the proposal goes to great lengths to prohibit any reprehensible uses of this research, and takes pains to protect the dignity of life that opponents so very honorably wish to preserve.

Those unfamiliar with the debate may wonder what all the hue and cry is. It's over the fact that the research material is created from the fetuses of human embryos, a terrible sin in the eyes of those opposed to this kind of scientific exploration.

Yet we believe Proposal 2 is sensitive to those concerns. It would restrict for research only those embryos that were created specifically for fertility treatment, and donated solely for that purpose. Only those embryos not suitable for implantation or that are in excess of clinical needs -- and would be discarded or destroyed if not used -- are allowed to be used.

Additionally, stem cells used in research could not be taken from any human embryo more than 14 days after cell division begins, and the new law would prohibit the sale or purchase of stem cells for research.

But the measure would, on the other hand, trump any local laws or ordinances adopted to thwart State Proposal 2.

Current Michigan law bans such research, which we believe is holding science back unnecessarily and unfairly in light of the strong promise of the potential for breakthroughs in treating disease and illness. Where science has a chance to relieve human suffering, there it must go as the greater good is served.

Please vote "YES" on State Proposal 2 on Nov. 4.

Remaking the city, one house at a time

Muskegon, an old city with many old but perfectly livable homes, seems to have hit on a great way of upgrading its housing stock while preserving the integrity and the continuity of its neighborhoods.

Besides its normal enforcement of building and fire codes, which often results in necessary repairs, but can lead to the demolition of structures that might have been saved, the city also offers this: a federal program that offers qualified homeowners free vinyl siding.

Some of the requirements are related to income levels. But more importantly, they are geared to encouraging and sustaining owner-occupancy. For example, anyone wishing to participate must have owned and lived in their house for at least one year. And in order to get their cost of the siding whittled down to zero, they must have lived in the house for another five years after the siding job was done.

So not only does a newly sided house or two give a big boost to the surrounding neighborhood, these owner-occupants have a built-in stake in the appearance and well-being of that same neighborhood.

"It's a good program. It's helped a lot of people," Ardis Haken, the siding program coordinator, said recently. To be exact, it has helped 157 homeowners since it replaced a paint giveaway program in 2003.

The city can only take on 30 or 35 homes for residing each year; that takes up about 25 percent of its entire federal Community Development Block Grant budget.

But, like Wil Griffin, head of the city's Department of Community and Neighborhood Services, we wish money could be found to do much more; it would be hard to find a more positive and constructive government housing program anywhere.