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## **Editorial: Michigan voters finally to decide stem cell issue**

For the first time, Michigan voters this fall will have a direct say in whether the state's world-class medical facilities and medical professionals should have the best opportunity possible to help people walk again or to cure cancer, juvenile diabetes and Parkinson's disease.

In a very real sense, voters will decide which counts the most -- an abandoned embryo that is headed for a Dumpster or the lives of untold thousands of people hoping desperately for cures of all kinds.

In short, that's what this campaign will be all about. Despite the millions that will be spent by Michigan's religious conservatives to claim stem cell research will lead to the wanton slaughter of human embryos, the petition is clear: Michigan's existing ban on stem cell research would no longer apply to embryos from fertility clinics if the embryos are no longer needed for pregnancy and slated for disposal. Period.

Foes will also falsely claim -- as they have already done -- that the initiative will open the door to human cloning. A spokesman for Michigan Citizens Against Unrestricted Science and Experimentation -- the name itself is spin -- has said the initiative "won't ban cloning." He's right. It won't. But that's because Michigan's 1999 law that bans human cloning will not be affected in any way and will still be the law of the land when this is all over.

That's it. That's the battleground. Though Michigan lawmakers are too cowed by the political muscle of the religious right to see the difference -- to put the life of a quadriplegic over the fate of an abandoned embryo headed for a landfill -- Michigan voters won't be.

That this struggle has to take place at all is a tragedy. Researchers around the globe say stem cells are the most basic building blocks of life and can be manipulated to possibly heal damaged spinal cords or kill cancer cells. The possibilities are literally limitless.

But from the earliest days of the debate, the pro-life movement (which appears to believe no living person is as important as an embryo) has claimed embryos will be destroyed for stem cell research while refusing to acknowledge that every year, tens of thousands of unwanted embryos created for possible use in fertility clinics are simply thrown in the garbage.

That the stem cells they contain are not used for possible life-changing research instead of being trashed is the real sin.

Two facts matter here. Only stem cells from embryos due to be destroyed will be available for research. Michigan's prohibition against human cloning will not change.

Tragically, millions that could and should go to other causes will be spent to claim otherwise, another waste. But the facts -- and the suffering of those hoping against hope for cures -- are for real.