



U.N. to Revisit Cloning Treaty

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02:00 AM Oct. 19, 2004 PT

After putting off a vote on a human cloning ban for a year, the United Nations will take up the issue again on Wednesday, with U.S. politics playing a central role.

Cloning and stem-cell research have been minor but potentially important issues in a close presidential race. How hard the United States pushes for a cloning ban will likely depend on how President Bush's campaigners believe the outcome will influence voters. The U.N. vote is expected shortly after discussions on Wednesday and Thursday, although it's possible the vote could be postponed once again.

In late 2003, Costa Rica led an effort to pass a complete cloning ban. The United Nations voted narrowly in December to postpone the decision for a year. Critics accused the United States of influencing Costa Rica in order to gain political advantage on the cloning issue.

Bills sponsored by conservative legislators to ban all cloning have languished in the U.S. Congress for several years because legislators can't agree whether to ban all cloning, including the type that could lead to disease treatments, or only reproductive cloning, which would lead to a human baby. This year, gaining political advantage has even higher stakes.

In a speech on Sept. 21, President Bush urged the United Nations to vote in favor of a total ban treaty.

"In this session, the U.N. will consider a resolution sponsored by Costa Rica calling for a comprehensive ban on human cloning. I support that resolution and urge all governments to affirm a basic ethical principle: No human life should ever be produced or destroyed for the benefit of another," he said.

Presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry (D-Massachusetts) has co-sponsored a Senate bill, [SB303](#), that would allow therapeutic cloning while prohibiting reproductive cloning.

The [Genetics Policy Institute](#) has been leading an education effort in the United Nations in an attempt to help delegates understand the complicated science of human cloning. The

group hopes to persuade delegates to vote for a ban on reproductive cloning, but allow therapeutic cloning, also known as somatic cell nuclear transfer. Research using therapeutic cloning so far has been promising. If the work is made illegal, or if scientists can't get funding, they say they won't have the opportunity to continue trying.

The debate over when life begins is at the heart of the desire to ban all cloning. Therapeutic cloning involves creating a human embryo that's an exact match of a patient with, for example, multiple sclerosis. Researchers would extract stem cells from the clone when it is a ball of about 100 cells, smaller than the period at the end of this sentence. They would then coax the stem cells to develop into nerve cells that will develop multiple sclerosis. Researchers hope to use this method to see the disease develop from the earliest stages in order to find a way to stop the disease's progress.

Scientists also believe they might be able to use therapeutic cloning to create replacement cells for almost any type of cell in the human body. Patients likely wouldn't reject these replacement cells since they would be an exact genetic match.

The United States currently has no federal cloning law, but New Jersey and California have [laws](#) allowing therapeutic cloning and outlawing reproductive cloning. Other states prohibit all cloning. Some countries, like the Philippines and Canada, have also outlawed all cloning. South Korea and Singapore encourage therapeutic cloning but outlaw reproductive cloning.

If a treaty banning all cloning passes in November, countries that allow cloning already, like Singapore, China and South Korea, might find themselves in a confusing state of affairs, because if they adopt the treaty, it could conflict with their laws. Other factors also contribute to cloning confusion.

"There may be voters who think it's odd that Republicans in California are asking for a (\$3 billion budget) line for something that other Republicans want to prohibit in New York," said a U.N. delegate who asked not to be named, referring to [California Proposition 71](#), a 10-year bond measure that would fund stem-cell research. California Gov. Schwarzenegger endorsed the proposition on Monday.