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## Cloning: what's stopping us? Law

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By: Ivanhoe Broadcast News



Lawmakers across the country are fighting a battle on what the laws should be -- both federal and statewide -- on cloning. Many lawmakers feel therapeutic cloning -- which could offer hope to millions of Americans suffering with debilitating diseases, should be allowed and funded with government money. Many others say all cloning -- whether it's reproductive or therapeutic --

should be banned entirely.

On Aug. 9, 2001, President George W. Bush announced that federal money could no longer be used for any embryonic stem cell lines that were created after that day. He has, however, provided some funding for stem cell lines that were created before Aug. 9, 2001. Many scientists say the problem is that research on therapeutic cloning was in such a state of infancy at that time that the stem cells they created up until then are not of that much use.

"What we have found since then is that these stem cell lines are not the panacea. Many of them cannot be used in clinical work. There is not enough ethnic diversity, so if you have a child with Tay-Sachs or sickle cell anemia, these stem cell lines cannot be used to really develop therapies for those types of diseases," Bernard Siegel, head of the Genetics Policy Institute, said.

"We should be able to use NIH (National Institutes of Health) funding to advance the research on these lines. It is very, very important. The NIH is probably the most powerful engine for scientific research the world has ever known, and for us not to be able to fully utilize federal funding for this research in its infancy really is a setback," Siegel continued.

A federal bill was recently passed by congress in the House to ban all cloning, but the Senate has not voted on it. Some politicians are putting their careers on the line over the issue. There are many Republicans who are against any type of cloning. Mike Castle, a Republican from Delaware, is not one of them. He's hoping to change federal law and encourages federal money to be spent on therapeutic cloning.

"It is my hope, frankly, that this breaks and someday three, five, 10 years from now, we will look back at it and say, 'Gee, why did we not do this sooner?'" Castle said.

It is important to note here that the legal argument surrounds therapeutic cloning. Most researchers and lawmakers agree that reproductive cloning should not be legal at this time.

Many states are taking the matter into their own hands and crafting their own laws regarding cloning. Currently, only 10 states have any laws on cloning. Arkansas, Iowa, Michigan, North Dakota and South Dakota have banned it completely. Michigan's law is the most stringent with a \$10 million fine and up to 10 years in prison for any scientist who violates it. On the other side of the debate, New Jersey has approved \$50 million and California is considering more than \$3 billion for research on therapeutic cloning.

Siegel has brought therapeutic cloning to the United Nations. Last year, a recommended worldwide ban on cloning was pending in the U.N. Siegel led a grassroots effort to defend cloning and was met with success. He delayed the potential ban by a single vote. The U.N will vote again this fall. If the U.N votes to recommend a ban on cloning, Siegel said it will suffocate the research.

"It would, in effect, demonize this type of research by calling it unethical, and even though the treaty recommendation would not have the force of law, it would certainly be used by social conservatives and the foes of the research as a propaganda tool," he said.

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