

Divide Undercuts Clone-Ban Effort By Kristen Philipkoski

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Discussions about human cloning legislation are heating up once again, with two opposing conservative camps vying for the best strategy to outlaw the practice.

On Thursday, Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kansas) reintroduced a bill to ban human cloning that has failed to pass twice since 2001. The bill would ban both reproductive cloning, which would lead to a baby, and therapeutic cloning of the type researchers believe could lead to treatments for human diseases.

But a new group has entered the debate. Led by [Leon Kass](#), chair of the President's Council on Bioethics, and Eric Cohen, editor in chief of *The New Atlantis*, a conservative journal on technology and society, the group says Brownback's strategy is flawed.

Brownback's bill "appears unlikely to succeed in the next Congress as well," the group wrote in a document listing its goals. The American Journal of Bioethics blog published [text](#) from the document.

Titled "Bioethics for the Second Term: Legislative Recommendations," the group's plan says in part: "Meanwhile, South Koreans successfully cloned human embryos; British HFEA authorizes human cloning-for-research; Harvard scientists get permission to do human cloning-for-research; a right to do such research is constitutionalized in California and endorsed in several other states. We did not get the preferred convention passed at the United Nations. We have lost much ground."

Kass did not respond to an e-mail and a phone call before press time. Cohen referred Wired News to his [editorial](#) in *The New Atlantis* when asked for comment.

Instead of linking therapeutic and reproductive cloning -- a tactic that has caused Brownback's bill to languish -- Kass and a group of influential conservative individuals want to prevent cloning by prohibiting the production of extra embryos for research.

The problem with that approach, some researchers say, is that scientists trying to improve in vitro fertilization, a common fertility treatment, often using IVF to create embryos that are studied and then destroyed.

"These embryos are not destined for reproductive purposes; they are made for research in order to improve the practice of IVF for our patients," said R. Alta Charo, a professor of law and bioethics at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. "I think that once this is understood, given the widespread public acceptance of IVF, it will not be hard to argue that it would be insane to forbid the crucial research needed to ensure that a common medical practice is safe and effective for our patient population."

The United States is one of the few developed countries without legislation regarding human cloning. Debates have fallen apart amidst squabbling over when human life begins and the inability to separate reproductive cloning from therapeutic cloning.

Michael West, CEO of Advanced Cell Technology, said it should not be up to Congress to decide whether [cloning for research](#), also known as somatic cell nuclear transfer, should proceed.

"It's important for medicine and science to go through the normal channels," West said. "That's why we have the [National Academies of Science](#) that formally recommends to Congress a position on things. It has already written a formal report and held a hearing giving advice to Congress."

The National Academies of Science determined in a [2002 report](#) that cloning for research performed according to specific guidelines should be allowed.

Researchers want to use cloned human embryos to develop disease-specific stem-cell lines that could teach them how to interfere with the progress of diseases, or to create cell therapies derived from cells cloned from a patient so they wouldn't be rejected.

Meanwhile, Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colorado) has [requested](#) that the inspector general of the Department of Health and Human Services investigate Kass. Using his role as chair of the President's Council on Bioethics to spearhead the effort to influence Congress on cloning legislation may be inappropriate behavior, according to DeGette. Kass has insisted his role on the council is separate from his efforts on cloning law.

"We would hope he would concentrate on giving a balanced view on bioethics," said Bernie Siegel, president of the Genetics Policy Institute, a pro-therapeutic-cloning organization, "rather than spending his time assisting the extreme lobby seeking to outlaw" research into human cloning therapies.



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