

PR Newswire

Stem Cell Folly – the Coleman-Isakson ‘No Hope for Patients Act’

WASHINGTON, April 9 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The following is a statement by Bernard Siegel, executive director of the Genetics Policy Institute:

Senators Norm Coleman and Johnny Isakson of Georgia filed S.30, an alleged compromise stem cell research bill they have euphemistically titled the "Hope Offered through Principled and Ethical Stem Cell Research" Act or "Hope Act" for short.

In reality, it offers scant hope to patients. Utilizing insidious language directly taken from the talking point playbook of the research foes, the bill would drive the National Institute of Health to push dubious research alternatives to embryonic stem cell research.

The bill directs the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to prioritize the alternative methods of securing embryonic stem cells utilizing the methods described in a White Paper of the President's Council on Bioethics, "Alternative Sources of Pluripotent Stem Cells." That report was widely criticized for touting dubious "false alternatives" to embryonic stem cell research. Indeed, Council member Dr. Michael Gazzaniga, expressed his disgust describing the report as a "diversion from the simple task at hand which is to move forward with the established laboratory techniques, that are already grounded on a clear ethical basis, for studying embryonic stem cell research and biomedical cloning."

The Coleman-Isakson "No Hope Act" would restrict the cloning of stem cell lines through SCNT, a method involving no pregnancy, but using only microscopic cells in a petri dish. SCNT offers promise for creating stem lines burdened with a disease for study of the root causes of birth defects and other medical conditions and for personalized treatments using genetically matched tissues. The bill sets in place impossible hurdles by disallowing the use of embryos to be donated for this potentially lifesaving medical research.

Coleman-Isakson endorses research upon naturally dead embryos, even though the hope of producing a living cell line from dead cells, is speculative at best and ethically questionable.

What is the true purpose of this bill? It is nothing more than political cover so politicians can go back to their constituents and boast that they are supporting "ethical" stem cell research. The bill fails to address the urgent, unmet need for funding new cell lines.

Coleman-Isakson also provides cover to the White House in its unyielding efforts to undermine embryonic stem cell research. Though the bill is offered as a so-called compromise, it is actually a Trojan Horse, filled with hooks to entangle legitimate embryonic stem cell research for years.

Millions of patients, their caregivers and loved ones are looking to the Senate this week to "unlock the cells" and lift the restrictions on stem cell research. Senators that unwisely support the Coleman-Isakson, as an alternative, are voting to place roadblocks to desperately needed research, thereby depriving real hope to suffering children and adults.

Genetics Policy Institute