

NIH OKAYS EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

Catholic League president Bill Donohue addresses today's news that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has cleared the way for federally funded embryonic stem-cell research:

When Barack Obama was in the Illinois State Senate, he fought passionately to deny little babies born alive as a result of a botched abortion the medical care they needed to survive. It is not surprising, then, that it took this ethically challenged man only seven weeks to overturn President Bush's executive order limiting government money to research on existing embryonic stem-cell lines. Now the NIH has decided which new lines are "appropriate," leading those scientists who will get rich from this disturbing decision to jump for joy.

It is true that all the stem lines that were approved involve embryos left over from fertility clinics. But it won't stop there, and that is because those with the muscle to do something about this issue—beginning with the president—are essentially utilitarians who lack a principled ethical base.

Dr. Bernadine Healy, a former director of the NIH, recently said that embryonic stem-cell research was basically "obsolete." That's because, in part, there are ways in which scientists can approximate this research by using ethically neutral adult stem cells. But this isn't good enough for those scientists who are literally salivating over the thought of getting their hands on the stimulus package loot. Dr. Francis Collins, the NIH's director, said it well when he offered the following Pavlovian response: "People are champing at the bit for the opportunity to get started."

What's next? Intentionally creating and destroying embryos

with more stimulus money? To those who say it doesn't matter, remember this: every one of us started as an embryo, and it is impossible to do this kind of research without first killing nascent human life. One more thing that should give us pause: Germany has the strictest bioethical guidelines in Europe. They know what happens when human rights are treated cavalierly. Obama should know something about the same subject.