

STEM CELL BILL SKIRTS REAL ISSUE

When the House passed a bill authorizing an expansion of federal funds for new embryonic stem cell research, we released the following statement to the press:

“Those who voted for the bill sponsored by Reps. Mike Castle and Diana DeGette are quick to emphasize that the legislation is tightly drawn: it will only affect some human embryos that would have been discarded had the donor couple not consented to having them used for research. Sounds reasonable. Embryos are not being created for the purpose of destroying them (which is what happens in stem cell research); the embryos would have been discarded anyway; written permission must be given by the donor couple; and some who are ill may be helped enormously by such research.

“So what’s wrong with the bill? What is wrong is that this piece of legislation allows lawmakers to once again skirt the only issue that really matters—the moral status of the human embryo. If the human embryo is nascent life, a self-directing organism that has the potential to develop into a full-grown person, then it is morally outrageous for anyone to kill it. If this is not true, then why are those who voted for the Castle-DeGette bill not taking a cavalier attitude? Why are they emphasizing that the bill is tightly written? In short, what is the source of their caution, if human life is not at stake? If they can’t answer this, then there is something terribly frightening at work.

“We went down this road before when Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun said it was not the job of the high court to decide the question of when life begins. But, in fact, in legalizing abortion, Blackmun and his six colleagues made it their job to declare children in their mother’s womb to be

less than human. That is why it is imperative to get all federal lawmakers to state with precision their understanding of when life begins. Until this is done, all stem cell bills should be tabled.”

For more on Blackmun’s ignoble contribution, see pp 8-9.