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The Secretary,
Senate Community Affairs Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

RE: Embryonic Stem Cell Research Bill 2006 (concerned citizen response)

Hello. My name is Con Pelekani and I am an Australian citizen concerned about the proposed amendment bills, put forward by Senators Patterson and Stott-Despoja, based on the 'recommendations' of the Lockhart Review on stem cell research and human cloning. Australia used to pride itself that it was the 'lucky country' and full of talent. As a former Fulbright scholar it concerns me that there are individuals in government who want their '15 minutes of fame', regardless of the social consequences of their actions. What is it that binds all people together, of difference cultures and ethnic backgrounds? Our common humanity. The proposed 'U-turn' in the attitude of the Senators proposing these amendment Bills confirms that the values and morals of individuals can be easily influenced, played upon the emotions of disabled persons or those will degenerative health conditions, who are misled by scientists and biotechnology companies, in believing that cures for all the hideous diseases of the 'developed world' are to be found in embryonic stem cells research.

I direct you to the truth and facts about cloning, which is what the proposed amendment Bills, are all about, to an authoritative and easy to read website: www.cloning.org.au.

To the educated person, there is no question that there is considerable pressure amongst politicians by biotechnology companies to open the flood gates and allow all sorts of experimentation in relation to stem cell research. This is a multi-billion dollar industry. As an engineer with a science research background myself, I know what the scientists can be easily influenced by their research, progressively relaxing their ethical standards in the pursuit of some 'breakthrough', regardless of whether an intrinsic evil is undertaken for an ultimate 'good for society'. It is known that embryonic stem cell research has not resulted in any breakthroughs in treating medical conditions. In contrast, at least 72 medical conditions have successfully been treated using adult stem cells. For researchers without strong ethical and moral fibre, this would provide the ultimate challenge: 72 versus 0. To date, the primary argument that is put forward is that there aren't enough embryos to do research on. Surplus embryos from IVF treatment are limited. Interestingly, what most people don't know is that 'fresh eggs' are required. Eggs that are harvested and frozen for long periods of time aren't as good as the fresh variety. It is well known that there is increasing pressure upon women to donate eggs for research, with an increasing number of companies offering financial incentives (\$50,000 is not unheard of in the USA or UK). What women aren't told is that there are no safeguards or controls in how many eggs are harvested and relatively high risks for permanent damage to the ovaries (leading to infertility) and death. Such a situation would only be a matter of time in Australia if the relatively tight laws on embryonic stem cell research were relaxed. College students with huge HECS debts, people with large mortgages, poor women and families, could be pressured

to participate in research programs, without knowing the health risks. The reality is that the probability of such situations taking place in our moral relativistic culture is very high.

As previously stated, there is a lot of hype about the possible benefits of embryonic stem cells, but silence about the interests of women. Cloning embryos to obtain stem cells requires a large supply of eggs, not always without risks. Only recently in the Britain, a woman undergoing IVF treatment died after her eggs were donated. Furthermore, an article in the prestigious journal, Nature, published on the 9th of August 2006, titled 'Health Effects of Egg Donation May Take Decades to Emerge', explained that specialists in reproductive medicine consider that there is insufficient information about the long-term risks of drugs used to stimulate ovulation. Some drugs have been implicated in the development of certain cancers. Cloning always amounts to the commodification of women's bodies.

The biotechnology companies are aware of this truth, which is why the Bill put forward by Stott-Despoja allows for the production of animal-human hybrid embryos, which would circumvent the potential 'ethical-moral' dilemma associated with human egg harvesting. The Lockhart Committee, explicitly recommended against such research. How do hybrid embryos circumvent the issue? Very simply, the cloning process, of which SCNT (somatic cell nuclear transfer) is one common method, uses an animal egg (whose nucleus is removed), is infused with a human nucleus. In this way, the embryo is mostly human (1-2% animal). Would such a being be called human? If such embryos were allowed to grow to term, what would they be?

The consequences of opening the floodgates to embryonic stem cell research, without a strong ethical and moral framework, can only be to man's demise. Many people will gain financially, but to the detriment of society.

I am recommending to you to reject both of the proposed Bills.

Yours sincerely,



Con Pelekani, Ph.D.