“As to diseases, make a habit of two things — to help, or at least do no harm.”
— Hippocrates, *The Epidemics*

**THE “POLITICAL SCIENCE” OF STEM CELLS**

**LESSON 4: THE MYTH OF THE 400,000 EMBRYOS**

Congress may vote soon on whether to divert taxpayer dollars toward stem cell research that requires destroying live human embryos. In the campaign to promote such funding, political hype has often substituted for the scientific facts. This series will help members of Congress distinguish mere politics from science.

**POLITICAL:**

“There are estimated to be more than 400,000 IVF embryos, which are currently frozen and will likely be destroyed if not donated, with informed consent of the couple, for research.”


**SCIENCE:**

From the research study that provided the estimate of 400,000 frozen embryos in the U.S.:

“Patients have designated only 2.8 percent (about 11,000 embryos) for research. The vast majority of frozen embryos are designated for future attempts at pregnancy.

“From those embryos designated for research, perhaps as many as 275 stem cell lines (cell cultures suitable for further development) could be created. The actual number is likely to be much lower.”


In short, over 200 House members based their support for the expanded destruction of human embryos on a factual claim that is 97% false.

The frozen embryos potentially available for research are enough for current laboratory research and animal trials – but then, so are the cell samples available under the Bush policy (many of which have not been turned into ongoing cell lines because they are not yet needed). **Treatment of any major human disease**, however, would require projects in human cloning, or the creation and destruction of vast numbers of new embryos carefully chosen to match the genetic diversity of the population. The myth of the 400,000 embryos is used to mask the fact that the campaign for “spare” embryos is useless in and of itself, and is only a transitional step to a broader agenda.

For more information to help distinguish politics from science on stem cell research, see our web site at www.stemcellresearch.org.

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