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## Aussies rethink '02 ban limiting stem-cell studies

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**Canberra, Australia** - Lawmakers begin debating legislation this week that would lift a ban on cloning human embryos for stem-cell research - a bill that, if passed, could make Australia a world leader in research into diseases such as diabetes and Alzheimer's.

Since Parliament passed Australia's first laws on stem-cell research in 2002, scientists have only been allowed to extract stem cells from spare embryos created for fertility treatments.

The House of Representatives begins debating legislation Thursday to lift the ban.

The bill will become law if the House endorses it. In an unusual move, lawmakers have been released by party leaders from following party lines and are being allowed a so-called conscience vote.

The Senate voted 34-32 on Nov. 7 to allow therapeutic cloning, which involves removing the nucleus of an unfertilized human egg and adding DNA to make it grow in a lab dish. The legislation succeeded only after proponents dropped the more contentious aspects, which would have allowed the creation of human-animal hybrid embryos.

Embryonic stem cells, sometimes called "master cells," have the potential to turn into any of the body's cells. Scientists hope to learn how to coax them into growing replacements for damaged tissue, which could lead to treatments for diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, as well as spinal-cord injuries, diabetes and arthritis.