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PM - Stem cell bill passes in-principle

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Reporter: Chris Uhlmann

MARK COLVIN: Back to Chief Political Correspondent Chris Uhlmann now, because there has been a division and the votes have been counted.

Chris, what is the result?

CHRIS UHLMANN: Mark, in the in-principle stage the ayes had 82 votes and the nays 62 votes so the bill has passed the House in the in-principle stage ...

MARK COLVIN: Just to be clear, in case somebody's just tuned in, in the last five minutes, we're talking about the Therapeutic Cloning Bill, and this means that the Therapeutic Cloning Bill has now passed the Senate and back through the House of Representatives.

CHRIS UHLMANN: And the thing that happens now, Mark, is they're debating two amendments put forward by the Tasmanian Michael Ferguson, and this is to clear up what he says are some unintended consequences of the bill, and that eggs cannot be harvested from an aborted female foetus.

Now, I should say that the people who proposed this bill, Dr Mal Washer of course in the House of Representatives, sees this as a complete furphy, and the members now have five minutes to speak each on this if they wish. If the members wanted to they could filibuster for quite some time yet, as they have an unlimited number of five minutes that they can speak to it, but it would be difficult to see this changing the way that the bill would go now, given there's such a split between the ayes and the nays.

MARK COLVIN: So you'd think this amendment will not succeed?

CHRIS UHLMANN: It wouldn't appear so, because there is a fairly big gap between the number of ayes and nays in the House, and the ayes will be arguing that the particular thing that the amendment is aiming to do, they believe, is to force it back into the Senate, where the vote was very, very close. So ...

MARK COLVIN: And get it bogged down?

CHRIS UHLMANN: And get it bogged down again. So they see this as a spoiling tactic.

It's interesting that the Prime Minister did encourage people, in his speech, to vote in favour of this amendment. So that might sway some people either way. So the bill has not yet passed the House, it will depend on this amendment. If this amendment gets up, it goes back to the Senate.

MARK COLVIN: But it was a conscience vote. Both Mr Howard and Mr Rudd were on the losing side in this case. It was a conscience vote and these amendments will also be on a conscience vote.

CHRIS UHLMANN: That's right.

MARK COLVIN: Chris Uhlmann, Chief Political Correspondent, thank you very much.

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