



[ABC Online](#)

The World Today - Stem Cell Bill put to the test in House of Reps

[This is the print version of story <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2006/s1801046.htm>]

The World Today - Thursday, 30 November , 2006 12:22:00

Reporter: Gillian Bradford

ELEANOR HALL: It's already passed the Senate, but today the Stem Cell Bill is facing up to its next test in the House of Representatives.

If passed, the law would ease restrictions on embryonic stem cell research and allow therapeutic cloning.

Most of those who've spoken so far in the House have supported the bill, and one MP has warned that if anyone tries to amend it, that could scuttle the legislation.

In Canberra, Gillian Bradford reports.

GILLIAN BRADFORD: It was the tightest of votes in the Senate, just a few weeks ago, when the Stem Cell Bill passed 34 votes to 32. And that has the bill's supporters concerned it could ultimately fail if anyone tries to further amend the bill.

Dr Mal Washer has been one the chief proponents of the legislation.

MAL WASHER: Any attempt to have further amendments in this House will be totally unacceptable as we all know the bill would not survive a review by the Senate.

GILLIAN BRADFORD: There will be a conscience vote at the end of this debate, and with the usual party shackles thrown off, members from both sides have spoken with passion.

Queensland Liberal Russell Broadbent.

RUSSELL BROADBENT: Mr Deputy Speaker, the continued prohibition of the sort of research this bill would allow will be a disaster for medical research in Australia, in my opinion.

As a nation we will not simply be standing still. We will not even lose ground. The effect will be that we will crash backwards in terms of medical research. It will rob us of the opportunity of punching above our weight in this policy area, as we do in so many other areas.

GILLIAN BRADFORD: Like many MPs who've spoken during the debate, the Special Minister of State Gary Nairn had a personal reason for wanting therapeutic cloning to proceed.

GARY NAIRN: I lost my wife last year to cancer. You know, cancer's one of the areas that one would hope that this legislation can have a substantial impact on.

GILLIAN BRADFORD: Labor MP Julia Irwin's father had Huntington's Disease. She went through the traumatic process of having to have herself and children tested for the gene.

JULIA IRWIN: But I'm sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I speak for those sufferers in asking that we keep, we definitely have to keep the door open to research which may one day lead to a cure or treatment of their disorder.

GILLIAN BRADFORD: Scientists can currently only use surplus embryos from IVF (In Vitro Fertilization) for research.

This legislation will ease restrictions on embryonic stem cell research, and allow therapeutic cloning.

Independent Peter Andren says he will oppose the bill, because adult stem cells provide the best hope of finding cures.

PETER ANDREN: In my contribution to the debate on the research involving embryos and prohibition of human cloning bill, in 2002 I stated that I have come to the conclusion that research into adult stem cells is providing more productive results than research involving embryos.

Nothing in the four years since August 2002, the Lockhart Review included, has convinced me, or arguably any other reasonable and objective observer, that this situation has changed.

GILLIAN BRADFORD: The Opposition's Health spokeswoman, Julia Gillard, says it would be wrong not to explore the possibilities of such research, just because there are no guarantees of where it might lead.

JULIA GILLARD: And we don't know whether, if we could fast-forward the clock 50 years, that scientific progress will have come through embryonic stem cells or adult stem cells. We don't know that now, and we can't know that now, and the only way we will ever know it is to allow both sorts of research to proceed.

ELEANOR HALL: Labor's Health spokeswoman Julia Gillard ending that report from Gillian Bradford in Canberra.

© 2006 Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Copyright information: <http://abc.net.au/common/copyrigh.htm>

Privacy information: <http://abc.net.au/privacy.htm>