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Stem cell debate to dominate Senate. 06/11/2006. ABC News Online

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Stem cell debate to dominate Senate

The Senate has set aside the entire week to debate the private member's bill which would allow the extension of therapeutic cloning and embryonic stem cell research.

There will be a conscience vote on the issue at the end of the week. (ABC TV)

There has been heavy lobbying in the lead-up to the debate on Liberal Senator Kay Patterson's bill.

Supporters of the bill say it could lead to new disease cures, but opponents say it is unethical and there are better alternatives, including the use of adult stem cells.

Queensland Nationals Senator Barnaby Joyce has indicated he will vote against the bill but says there may be enough supporters in the House for the legislation to go through.

"And that's a sad time for our nation, a sad time for a lot of people," he said.

"Because why do we need to unnecessarily come up with controversial processes when there is much non-controversial alternative, which everybody's happy to pursue and in fact Queensland is in the forefront and it is producing great beneficial result.

"Every dollar we spend down the line on embryonic stem cell research is a dollar we fail to spend on adult stem cell research and stem cells from umbilical cords, which really can produce cures and really cure people with affliction."

There will be a conscience vote at the end of the week.

Liberal Senator Judith Troeth says she fears those opposed to embryonic stem cell research will use dirty tactics to defeat the bill.

Senator Troeth says she expects the conscience vote will be close and Senators are under intense pressure, particularly from the "no" side of the debate.

"I think we've seen some already with people extending the 'no' side of the debate to include impossible scenarios which are strictly prohibited by the Lockhart committee," she said.

"So I won't be surprised at what happens or what's said, put it that way."

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