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Emotional stem cell debate to continue

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Senators will continue their emotional debate on a controversial bill to overturn a ban on therapeutic cloning.

After a day of discussion without the strictures of the party line, senators were evenly split for and against the legislation.

The private member's bill from former health minister Kay Patterson would allow researchers to clone human embryos to extract their stem cells, in the hope of one day finding cures for debilitating diseases.

The bill requires cloned embryos to be destroyed within 14 days and does not allow them to be implanted into a woman.

Existing laws allow stem cells to be harvested from surplus IVF embryos, but prevent embryos being created through therapeutic cloning.

Government ministers showed unusual discord as Finance Minister Nick Minchin labelled the bill "repugnant", while Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone praised the science behind it as offering "great hope to humanity".


After 10 hours of debate, support and opposition remained evenly balanced, with 18 senators speaking in support of the bill and 18 against.

Prime Minister John Howard says he has not yet made up his mind on the issue.

The House of Representatives will only get a chance to debate the bill if it is passed in the Senate.

Senators are expected to vote on the legislation by Friday.

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