



## 4 NU regents author resolution to limit stem cell research

By MELISSA LEE / Lincoln Journal Star | Posted: Friday, November 13, 2009 6:15 am

Four pro-life University of Nebraska regents have co-authored a resolution that would limit embryonic stem cell research at the NU medical center to only stem cell lines approved under former President George W. Bush.

The resolution sets up a stem cell showdown at the eight-member board's Nov. 20 meeting. There will be time for public comment before regents vote on the measure.

The resolution's co-authors are Regents Tim Clare of Lincoln, Bob Phares of North Platte and Randy Ferlic and Howard Hawks of Omaha.

All have stated their opposition to the controversial embryonic stem cell research, and all have received support from Nebraska Right to Life, whose political endorsements reach tens of thousands of voters each election cycle.

The fifth pro-life regent who has earned Nebraska Right to Life's endorsement, Jim McClurg of Lincoln, opted not to join in on the resolution, Clare said, a decision that puts him in a critical voting position.

Clare declined to speculate why McClurg didn't join, and McClurg couldn't be reached for comment late Thursday.

In bringing forth the resolution, the four regents hope to limit stem cell research at the med center to the methods they believe are most promising, such as noncontroversial adult stem cell research, Clare said.

"We want what's best for the University of Nebraska," he said.

Opponents also find the research morally objectionable because harvesting embryonic stem cells requires destruction of an embryo.

Limiting the research in the face of newly relaxed guidelines under President Barack Obama "is the position of all of our congressional delegates," Clare said.

"It's consistent with where we feel the leaders have indicated they want things to go, at least in our state."

Clare, elected last year, also noted he's acting in accordance with his campaign promises: "I told folks during the campaign what my position was, and I'm sticking to my word."

Julie Schmit-Albin, executive director of Nebraska Right to Life, hailed the resolution as a sign pro-life regents are listening to their constituents.

"I'm just real pleased that they're moving forward," she said. "It's what we've been asking for."

She said her group will continue to ask voters to press McClurg.

But Sanford Goodman, president of the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures, blasted the resolution and countered that McClurg "is the intelligent one."

"It's the absolute wrong thing to do for the University of Nebraska and the state of Nebraska," Goodman said of limiting embryonic stem cell research.

"It will have a corrosive impact on the reputation of the university as a leading biomedical research institution. It is unwarranted. It is unprecedented for the board of a public university to take an action that is more restrictive than state law."

Goodman endorses the recommendation of NU President J.B. Milliken, who said last month regents should let their current policy stand, thereby allowing embryonic stem cell research to expand.

Milliken believes expansion is the right move if NU wants to be a research leader. He also believes embryonic stem cell research holds great promise in the pursuit of treatments for diseases like Parkinson's and diabetes.

That opinion is the overwhelming majority within scientific circles, Goodman said, and regents have heard such testimony repeatedly.

Goodman likened the issue to football: If advocates were pressing for the elimination of the option play, and Nebraska Athletic Director Tom Osborne testified in opposition to a ban, regents surely would listen, Goodman said.

"Well, they have had come before them the Tom Osbornes of the scientific world," he said. "For them to totally ignore that expert testimony and substitute their own judgment that derives from their religious convictions, as leaders of a public university, is outrageous."

Supporters of the research also note state law already bans creation and destruction of embryos for research purposes. Any embryonic stem cell lines med center scientists would gain access to would come from embryos left over from fertility treatments; those embryos generally are thrown out.

Milliken believes that law -- LB606, passed last year -- served as a resolution of public policy on embryonic stem cell research.

Schmit-Albin disagreed. She cited a letter sent to her this week by three lawmakers who helped negotiate the law -- Speaker Mike Flood and Sens. Brad Ashford and Steve Lathrop -- that said the deal didn't prohibit advocates from lobbying regents on the issue.

Advocates certainly have lobbied.

Last month, regents heard more than an hour's worth of testimony on embryonic stem cell research. Half of the commenters were in favor of expanding the research; half were against.

However regents vote, some will be disappointed.

Still, it's time for regents to act, Clare said.

"At the end of the day, we're going to come to a vote and then go on to discuss additional university issues," he said.

"We have a university to govern and work on policy for, and I'm wanting to put time toward those issues as well."

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