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## Stem-cell policy change reignites debate

Backers of Obama's move say it will save lives; foes say it will take them

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President Obama's reversal of a policy limiting federal funding for embryonic stem cell research on Monday rekindled fiery debate here and around the nation with supporters saying the research may one day save lives and opponents saying it's akin to murder.

Scientists believe the cells can be used to treat a host of conditions from cancer to spinal cord injury because they can become any kind of cell in the body.

The idea has given hope to millions suffering with painful, crippling and sometimes fatal afflictions. But it's also ignited intense religious and ethical debate because it uses cells from unused 3- to 5-day-old human embryos donated by couples undergoing fertility treatment.

U.S. Rep. Gresham Barrett, who last week announced his candidacy for governor, said there are alternatives, including adult stem cells.

"My heart goes out to all of those struggling with debilitating diseases and disabilities," said Barrett, R-S.C., "but as someone who believes that life begins at conception, I do not believe that destroying innocent human life is an option."

Holly Gatling, executive director of South Carolina Citizens for Life, likened the ruling to legalized slavery, saying embryos "live or die at the whim of their owners." Oran P. Smith, CEO of the Palmetto Family Council, said experimenting with embryos "destroys human life, however small."

However, Dr. Suzanne Fanning, medical oncologist with Cancer Centers of the Carolinas, said the move will foster science that could one day save the lives of people with cancer and other afflictions.

"It is necessary," she said. "And I think it will spawn a lot of research that will potentially have wide-reaching possibilities."

Dr. Arthur Caplan, director of the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania, said in a column there are hundreds of thousands of embryos that will never be used.

"Human embryos are routinely destroyed at many (fertility) clinics," Caplan said. "Why would we not permit these embryos, which already exist and whose fate is sealed, to be used in research?"

Cindy Alewine, CEO of the Alzheimer's Association of South Carolina, said the association's goal is to eradicate Alzheimer's disease and therefore it supports legitimate research that has promise.

Still, U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, R-S.C., said that "research that kills some humans in an attempt to help other humans is devaluing for all humans." And U.S. Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C., called the decision "wrong no matter how noble the scientific goals."

Sen. Lindsey Graham said, "I do not believe it is acceptable to use taxpayer dollars to condone the

destruction of viable human embryos, the early stage of all human life, for research purposes."

But U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., said a majority of Americans support stem cell research, adding the president restored hope to millions.

Fanning, who performs stem cell transplants on cancer patients using their own or a sibling's cells, she says she envisions a day when embryonic stem cell research is conducted here.

"We are several years away from any kind of clinical use of these agents," she said. "But when that time comes, absolutely I see us getting involved in this."

Dr. Stephen Lanier, associate provost for research at the Medical University of South Carolina, also expects MUSC will participate as the state pursues bioengineering.

"Everything we can do to learn about stem cell biology will have a long-term benefit for society," he said.

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