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U.S. House Judiciary Committee Approves Ban on Cloning of Human Embryos; Full House to Vote the Week of February 24 on Issue of “Human Embryo Farms”

WASHINGTON (Feb. 12, 2003) – The Judiciary Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives today approved legislation to prohibit the creation of human embryos by cloning in the United States. Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner (R-Wi.) announced that the full House will take up the issue the week of February 24. **Douglas Johnson, legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), applauded the committee vote as “a step towards preventing cloned human embryo farms from opening for business.”**

The Judiciary Committee approved , 19-12, the Weldon-Stupak Human Cloning Prohibition Act (H.R. 534). The bill is nearly identical to legislation approved by the House on July 31, 2001, but never acted on by the Senate. It is very similar to the current Brownback-Landrieu bill in the Senate (S. 245). These bills are supported by President Bush, who in his January 28 State of the Union address repeated his past calls for Congress to approve legislation to ban all human cloning. The President warned in an April 10, 2002 speech that without such a law, human “embryo farms” may begin operation in the United States. (The President’s speech is here: www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/04/print/20020410-4.html)

The Judiciary Committee rejected amendments that would have permitted human embryos to be created by cloning and allowed to develop for days or weeks to harvest their stem cells or for other research purposes. However, on the House floor, opponents of H.R. 534 are expected to offer a competing proposal (a “substitute amendment”) similar to the Hatch-Feinstein bill (S. 303). Such a substitute was offered in 2001 by Congressman Jim Greenwood (R-Pa.), and was rejected. **NRLC’s Johnson said that the approach taken in the Hatch-Feinstein and Greenwood proposals, to permit human cloning for research, “would give a green light to growing human embryos to be harvested for their parts.”** Bush Administration officials have repeatedly warned that legislation to permit human cloning for research would be subject to a veto.

Many press reports in recent weeks have misunderstood how the competing bills really differ. In reality, neither side’s bill would restrict research on human ova (“eggs”), and both allow the use of cloning methods to produce human DNA, cells, or tissues. The real difference is this: The Weldon-Stupak and Brownback-Landrieu bills ban the creation of *human embryos* by cloning, while the Hatch-Feinstein and Greenwood proposals would allow human embryos to be created by cloning.

NRLC’s Johnson said some journalists and editorial writers recently have shown “remarkable gullibility” in reporting that the Hatch-Feinstein bill “prohibits any [cloning] research on an egg cell after 14 days,” and similar absurdities. Johnson commented, **“Any middle school science student knows that a human ovum or ‘egg’ is a single cell, with only 23 chromosomes and no sex. It is biological nonsense to apply the term ‘egg’ to a five-day-old or two-week-old developing cloned embryo, which has 46 chromosomes and is male or female. And it is doubly silly to report that a bill would ban cloning except on ‘unfertilized eggs,’ since cloning by definition is reproduction without sexual fertilization. All clones, animal or human, are ‘unfertilized’ no matter how long they live.”** NRLC has released a factsheet that explains what the competing bills would actually allow and what they would forbid, at www.nrlc.org, or in PDF at www.nrlc.org/Killing_Embryos/Cloningmediabackgrounder.pdf