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August 23, 2000

Final guidelines for destructive human embryo research, released today by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), are immoral and illegal as well as unnecessary for medical progress.

Immoral: For the first time in history, our federal government will promote research in which developing human beings are destroyed. The Clinton Administration has ignored the moral objections submitted by tens of thousands of Americans during the NIH's public comment period, compounding the problem by forcing conscientiously opposed taxpayers to support this immoral research.

Illegal: Funding of research in which human embryos are harmed or destroyed is prohibited by federal law. The new guidelines seek to circumvent this law, by telling researchers how to obtain and destroy live human embryos if they wish to receive a stem cell research grant. This bookkeeping trick is, to say the least, an exercise in hypocrisy.

Unnecessary: The claim that embryonic stem cell research is needed for new medical advances has been rebutted by numerous breakthroughs in adult stem cell research and other alternatives. Last week, for example, NIH-funded researchers announced that they can produce a virtually limitless supply of new nerve cells for transplants from patients' own bone marrow stem cells. This approach "overcomes the ethical and immunologic concerns associated with the use of fetal tissue" (*Journal of Neuroscience Research*, August 15, p. 369).

President Clinton's own National Bioethics Advisory Commission concluded last September that because human embryos deserve respect as a developing form of human life, destroying them "is justifiable only if no less morally problematic alternatives are available for advancing the research." In fact, it is always wrong to directly destroy one innocent member of the human family to help another. But even by the Administration's own looser standard, what the NIH now proposes cannot be justified.

We will explore all avenues in Congress and elsewhere for reversing these indefensible guidelines, so medical research may again be guided by sound moral principles.

For further background on this issue, see:
www.nccbuscc.org/prolife/issues/bioethic and
www.nccbuscc.org/prolife/publicat/lifeissues/08182000.htm

