



Speech by

Mr D. BRISKEY

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**PROHIBITION OF HUMAN CLONING BILL
REGULATION OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN EMBRYOS AND
ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY BILL**

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (5.31 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of both bills before the House and I do this after thinking very long and very hard, as I am sure every member of this House has. At the outset I place on record my vehement opposition to reproductive cloning or human cloning and welcome the provisions of the bill which seek to ban this. I am confident that I am not alone when I say that the thought of human cloning is a truly frightening concept. I know many members intend to expand on their arguments against human cloning. For the most part, our thoughts are on the same wavelength. For this reason, I will concentrate my comments on research involving excess human embryos.

As I said at the outset, I have thought long and hard on this issue. After speaking to people and listening to the debate, I have taken the view that it is all too easy to pass this issue off as an ethical or moral dilemma. I have heard the opposing arguments which rely on everything from the question about when life begins right through to the scaremongering which suggests that despite our efforts to legislate against it this practice will inevitably lead to human cloning. There is no doubt that the issues before us are complex. The debate is vigorous, and it should be. As legislators we need to be thinking long and hard about the implications of what is proposed. However, we also need to think about the implications of where we might be if we do not head down this road.

For many, 'ethics' is merely a word. When it comes to an opportunity to make a decision which could dramatically improve thousands and thousands of lives, I believe we need to look far beyond a word. This issue is much more than an ethical issue; it is a medical one. This legislation provides an enormous opportunity for new and important advancements in medicine. I firmly believe that the potential medical and scientific benefits to be gained from stem cell research are so great that it justifies the use of excess human embryos. One important factor we will inevitably encounter during this debate is the unknown. From a purely legal perspective, I, too, can see some dangers in legislating for an ever-changing and ever-developing area such as medical science. We cannot begin to imagine the future potential of medical science, but is that sufficient reason to deny it the opportunity?

Twenty years ago the advent of IVF technology and 50 years ago organ transplants received the same negative arguments currently put by those opposed to this legislation. I am confident that members will recall the view of the pessimists at the time the first test-tube baby was born. There was outrage. There was certainly anger and there was a prediction that babies would be born in test-tube farms. One million IVF babies later, many of us have come to accept IVF technology as the miracle that has allowed infertile couples to become proud parents, and all of us in this House know friends who have gone through this. But there are no test-tube farms to be seen.

Similarly, the first successful kidney transplant in 1954 was surrounded in controversy. Almost 50 years on and the possibility of reversing a person in an end stage of organ failure is a reality. Who of us here today would advocate that giving medical science the opportunity to explore the possibilities of organ transplants was the wrong decision? We are all entitled to our

beliefs, but the question that has to be asked is this: do we as elected members of parliament have the right to deny the facilitation of research which may dramatically improve people's lives or provide a glimmer of hope to those suffering with diseases or illnesses for which cures may be found? As a parent, I cannot. My conscience will not allow it. What this debate calls for is commonsense and compassion.

As parliamentarians we have an obligation to make the hard decisions which will bring about change that will lead to the betterment of our society. For those who oppose the use of embryonic stem cells purely because they do not support the IVF process, I think they need to look beyond their own moral conscience and ask themselves what the community wants and expects of us. Supporting this legislation is about supporting the potential of miracles and giving a glimmer of hope to those who cling to almost none. Surely it is the right of the men and women who access IVF to determine the fate of their excess embryos. They have shown their sanctity in human life by seeking medical assistance in creating a human life. I think it needs to be acknowledged that it is not a decision many couples will take lightly, but it is their decision. In my own mind, throwing away excess embryos is of little benefit to anyone. I cannot see a reason why, with a patient's informed consent, we cannot allow our scientists to use some of those embryos to create stem cells that may help thousands and thousands of people. As a parent I am not willing to let my voice end all certainty about a future for those people.

What about adult stem cells? We use them now. The reality is this: legislating for the use of embryonic research does not make the use of adult stem cells a futile process. In fact, scientists will work together with both embryonic and adult stem cells. The main difference with adult stem cells is that, while they constantly divide, as embryonic stem cells do, adult stem cells do not have the ability to transform into any one of the 220 different types of cells. In this respect, they are not as powerful as embryonic stem cells. Embryonic stem cells can actually form any tissue of the body and scientists are currently investigating how to direct them to be nerve cells, cardiac muscle cells, pancreatic eyelet cells or virtually any other cell. The potential here is truly amazing. I am certainly not condoning what some have called a free-for-all on embryos. What this legislation will achieve is a regulated industry involving only research that has a solid scientific case or medical benefit. While this decision is ours to make, I firmly believe that it is not for me to deny a child or a child's family a cure for any number of diseases and conditions for which medical research holds the key. As members of parliament, we should want to be the ones who can turn to those who suffer and say, 'We do not know if this research has all the answers you are looking for, but we are not afraid to try.'