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North Dakota governor signs bill to ban the creation of human embryos by cloning; big votes put spotlight on Senators Dorgan and Conrad on Bush-backed federal bill to ban all human cloning

North Dakota Governor John Hoeven (R) today signed into law a bill to ban the creation of human embryos by cloning. The bill, HB 1424, is patterned after the Brownback-Landrieu bill that is currently under consideration in the U.S. Senate – but in the U.S. Senate, opposition to a ban on all human cloning is far stronger than in North Dakota. So far, neither of North Dakota’s two U.S. senators has expressed support for the similar bill, which is strongly backed by President Bush, to prohibit nationwide the creation of human embryos by cloning.

The North Dakota ban passed the state House of Representatives on February 17, 90-1, and the state Senate on March 26, 46-0.

However, in the U.S. Senate, the pro-human-cloning forces have so far blocked such legislation. There is currently a struggle underway between two diametrically conflicting bills dealing with human cloning. The Brownback-Landrieu bill (S. 245) would ban the creation of human embryos by cloning. The competing Hatch-Feinstein bill (S. 303) would permit and encourage the cloning of human embryos for biomedical research that would kill them. President Bush strongly supports the complete ban on human cloning for any purpose.

The U.S. Senate has not yet voted on either bill. However, last year Senator Byron Dorgan (D) introduced his own bill, which would have allowed any number of human embryos to be created by cloning, and would have made it unlawful to implant such an embryo into “a uterus or the functional equivalent of a uterus.” North Dakota Right to Life, National Right to Life, and other pro-life groups criticized this as a “clone and

kill” bill, and President Bush has threatened to veto any such legislation to allow human cloning for research. It appears that Senator Kent Conrad (D) has not yet taken a definitive position on either of the competing federal bills to allow or prohibit the creation of human embryos by cloning.

“President Bush has warned that unless the cloning of human embryos is banned, ‘human embryo farms’ will open for business,” said Douglas Johnson, legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC). “In light of these overwhelming bipartisan votes in the legislature to reject human embryo farming and human fetus farming, we hope that Senator Dorgan will reconsider his past support for human cloning for biomedical research, and that Senator Conrad will decide to support a complete ban on human cloning.”

By a lopsided bipartisan vote of 241-155 on February 27, the U.S. House of Representatives approved the Weldon-Stupak bill, which -- like HB 1424 and the Brownback-Landrieu bill -- would ban creation of any human embryos by cloning. In his January 28 State of the Union address, President Bush repeated his past calls for Congress to approve legislation to ban all human cloning. On February 26, the White House issued a statement strongly condemning the competing legislation that would allow cloning for research, saying, “The Administration unequivocally is opposed to the cloning of human beings either for reproduction or for research. . . . The Administration is strongly opposed to any legislation that would prohibit human cloning for reproductive purposes but permit the creation of cloned embryos or development of human embryo farms for research, which would require the destruction of nascent human life.”

The signing of the North Dakota ban was the second major victory in two weeks for the movement to ban all human cloning. On March 24, Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee signed a similar complete ban on human cloning into law. The biotechnology industry lobby and some other supporters of human cloning have disseminated a great deal of misinformation regarding what the different pieces of cloning-related legislation would do, and this sometimes results in erroneous reporting on the issue. For a clear explanation of the difference between so-called “therapeutic cloning” and so-called “reproductive cloning,” and of the actual distinctions between the two radically different legislative approaches to human cloning, please see the paper “Human Cloning Legislation: Misconceptions and Realities,” which can be read or downloaded in multiple formats at www.nrlc.org/killing_embryos/index.html