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Bishops campaign against embryonic stem-cells

Nancy Frazier O'Brien Catholic News Service | May. 11, 2009

WASHINGTON -- As the National Institutes of Health continued to gather comments on the draft guidelines that would permit federal funding of embryonic stem-cell research, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops launched a new campaign urging support for ethical cures and treatments "we can all live with."

The "Oppose Destructive Stem-Cell Research" campaign at www.usccb.org/stemcellcampaign also encourages Web users to contact Congress and NIH to express opposition to the draft guidelines.

May 26 is the NIH deadline for public comment on the draft guidelines, which would allow the use of federal funds for stem-cell research on embryos created for reproductive purposes at in vitro fertilization clinics and later discarded.

Donald M. Raibovsky, an NIH spokesman, said a total of 13,503 comments on the stem-cell guidelines had been received as of May 8.

The home page for the bishops' new campaign outlines the reasons that the proposed guidelines are considered unacceptable and provides links to USCCB resources on stem-cell research in English and Spanish.

In a video on the site, Cardinal Justin Rigali, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, said the U.S. bishops "will be writing to Congress and the administration about the need to restore and maintain barriers against the mistreatment of human life in the name of science, and we urge other concerned citizens to do the same."

The campaign Web site says the proposed guidelines, drawn up after President Barack Obama's March 9 executive order reversed the Bush administration's prohibition on stem-cell research involving the destruction of human embryos, "would -- for the first time -- use taxpayer funds to encourage the killing of embryonic human beings for their stem cells."

"This marks a new chapter in divorcing biomedical research from its necessary ethical foundation, respect for human life at all stages," it adds.

"Even if, like the embryos targeted by the NIH policy, an embryo may be at risk of being abandoned by his or her parents in a fertility clinic, that does not give researchers or the government a right to kill that human being -- much less a right to make the rest of us subsidize that destructive agenda," the campaign materials say.

The campaign also features three new ads for Web and print use, each focusing on the advances made in stem-cell research that does not involve the use of embryos.

"Embryonic stem cells have been hyped," says one of the ads. "But it's the adult stem cells that are showing hope. So where's the future?"

On the campaign Web site, the bishops said members of Congress and the Obama administration have plans to expand stem-cell research.

"They want to obtain stem cells by destroying human embryos specially generated for research through in vitro fertilization or cloning procedures -- a 'create to kill' policy," they said.

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