



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
SURVEY OF GEORGIA REGISTERED VOTERS
REGARDING STEM CELL RESEARCH
SEPTEMBER 5-7 & 9-10, 2006

This survey of 600 Georgia registered voters indicates remarkably well-developed views on the complex issue of stem cell research. Whether the indicator is the very low percentage of undecided opinions on various questions, the stability of the results throughout the course of the survey, or the internal consistency of the findings, this survey suggests that Georgia voters have thought about and discussed this issue.

Moreover, voters make sharp distinctions about the kinds of research they do and do not support. An overwhelming proportion of Georgians support adult stem cell research on cells taken from places like bone marrow. By a two-to-one margin, they also support research on embryos donated by fertility clinics that would otherwise be discarded. Therapeutic cloning is a closer call, but a majority of Georgians still support it, even after hearing strong arguments both for and against the research. On the other hand, an overwhelming proportion of Georgians oppose reproductive cloning to create a genetically identical human being.

Stem cell research offers enormous medical promise, and creates enormous ethical challenges. This survey indicates that Georgians have been wrestling with those trade-offs, and have made initial judgments in favor of at least some kinds of stem cell research. Highlights of the survey include:

- 1. Nearly nine in ten Georgia voters have seen or heard something about stem cell research.** Georgians are remarkably aware of the stem cell issue, with 86 percent having heard something about it – 40 percent have heard a lot, while 46 percent have heard just a little. Only 14 percent of voters have not seen or heard something about the issue.
- 2. Two-thirds of voters believe that “any medical research that is allowed by federal law should be allowed in Georgia.”** Voters agree with this statement by a 67 to 30 percent margin. Forty percent of voters strongly agree, while 19 percent strongly disagree.
- 3. By a margin of two-to-one, Georgians support embryonic stem cell research on donated embryos.** Voters support “research on stem cells taken from donated embryos from fertility clinics that would otherwise be discarded” by a 63 to 33 percent margin, with only 5 percent undecided. Intensity is on the side of the supporters, with 40 percent strongly supporting and 24 percent strongly opposing research on donated embryos.

4. After hearing strong arguments both for and against research on donated embryos, opinions remain virtually unchanged.

Which of these statements about research on donated embryos comes closer to your view?

- a. *Supporters say Georgia should allow research on stem cells taken from donated embryos from fertility clinics that would otherwise be discarded. That research has the potential to find cures to save your life and the lives of your loved ones. It makes no sense to throw away embryos that could do so much good for so many people.*
- b. *Opponents say Georgia should prohibit research on stem cells taken from donated embryos from fertility clinics that would otherwise be discarded. Experimenting on viable human embryos for any purpose is a line that should not be crossed. That research is unethical and immoral.*

Georgia voters side with supporters of research on donated embryos by 63 to 34 percent, almost identical to the initial 63 to 33 percent margin derived before the arguments were presented. That stability suggests that Georgians have thought about and discussed this research before the survey was conducted. Otherwise strong arguments both for and against the research would have had a greater effect on the numbers.

When the survey posed the initial question again toward the end of the survey, support rose to 67 to 31 percent, with 42 percent strongly supporting and 24 percent strongly opposing research on donated embryos.

5. A majority of Georgians supports therapeutic cloning research. Voters support “*therapeutic cloning research, or creating an embryo in a laboratory that would not be placed in a woman’s body, but that would produce cells that could lead to new treatments for diseases*” by a 53 to 41 percent margin. Intensity is evenly matched – 29 percent of voters both strongly support and strongly oppose this type of research.

6. As with stem cell research from donated embryos, arguments for and against therapeutic cloning do little to change voters’ view on the issue.

Which of these statements about therapeutic cloning research comes closer to your view?

- a. *Supporters say Georgia should allow therapeutic cloning research. Therapeutic cloning creates stem cells that could save your life or the lives of your loved ones. It does not create cloned babies. It uses a patient’s own cell and an unfertilized egg to create stem cells in a laboratory that match the patient’s genetic makeup. Those stem cells could then be used to develop new drugs and grow new cells to repair damaged organs that would be much less likely to be rejected because they would be genetically identical to the patient.*
- b. *Opponents say Georgia should prohibit therapeutic cloning research. Therapeutic cloning creates a cloned human embryo which is then destroyed to obtain the stem cells. Experimenting on viable human embryos for any purpose is a line that should not be crossed. That research is unethical and immoral.*

After hearing this information, voters say that Georgia should allow this research by a 55 to 42 percent margin, almost identical to the 53 to 41 percent margin before hearing the arguments.

When the question was asked again toward the end of the survey in its original form support increased modestly, to 56 to 41 percent. Intensity increases on both sides, but remains relatively even, with 32 percent of voters strongly supporting, and 30 percent strongly opposing therapeutic cloning research.

7. One question shows significant change in opinions over the course of the survey: creating embryos in a laboratory for the purpose of research. When asked initially, voters are evenly divided on whether they support or oppose “*research on stem cells taken from embryos that have been created in a laboratory for the purpose of research*” 49 percent support and 44 percent oppose that research. Intensity in this case is on the side of the opponents – 32 percent strongly oppose it, compared to 28 percent who strongly support it.

After hearing the above arguments both for and against research on donated embryos and therapeutic cloning, the margin of support for “*Research on stem cells taken from embryos that have been created in a laboratory for the purpose of research*” jumps to 57 to 40 percent, with a change in the balance of intensity – 31 percent of voters strongly support the research, while 28 percent strongly oppose it.

The change appears to be caused by voters equating this type of research with therapeutic cloning. Indeed, the 57 to 40 percent margin in favor of this research is strikingly close to the final 56 to 41 percent margin in favor of therapeutic cloning. Apparently voters ultimately see these two statements as very similar.

8. Georgians overwhelmingly oppose reproductive cloning. By a 79 to 16 percent margin, Georgians oppose “*reproductive cloning, or creating an embryo to be placed in a woman’s body that is an exact genetic duplicate of an existing human being*” 67 percent strongly oppose reproductive cloning, and only 6 percent strongly support it.

9. By a margin of almost eight-to-one, Georgians support adult stem cell research. Voters support “*research on stem cells taken from adults that are found in places like bone marrow*” by an overwhelming 85 to 11 percent margin, with 56 percent saying they “strongly support” it. Support for this research is remarkably consistent across all subgroups in the sample.

10. Voters are torn on limiting stem cell research only to adult stem cells, especially if they think we can get the same benefits from adult stem cells compared to embryonic stem cells. Voters were presented with a choice between allowing research on embryonic stem cells, or only adult stem cells:

Which of these statements about embryonic stem cell research comes closer to your view?

- a. *Supporters of embryonic stem cell research say Georgia should allow stem cell research on cells taken from embryos. Embryos used in this research are created in a laboratory dish, and are no more than 200 cells and no more than two weeks old. The overwhelming majority of medical experts believe that research on these embryonic stem cells could provide cures for many diseases and injuries that cannot be provided by adult stem cells. Embryonic stem cell research is a major new medical breakthrough, and medical researchers should be allowed to pursue research that could save your life or the lives of your loved ones.*
- b. *Opponents of embryonic stem cell research say Georgia should limit stem cell research to cells taken from adults. Research on stem cells taken from embryos has not yet*

provided and may never provide cures. Research on stem cells taken from adults has already provided successful treatments for a number of diseases without the ethical and moral dilemmas of taking stem cells from embryos. We should concentrate research on adult stem cells, and prohibit unethical and immoral experimentation on embryos.

When presented in this way, 48 percent of voters say that Georgia should allow embryonic stem cell research, while 45 percent say that Georgia should limit research to adult stem cells. Based on the results to other questions, the crucial sentence in this exchange appears to be the opponents' statement that "*research on stem cells taken from adults has already provided successful treatments for a number of diseases without the ethical and moral dilemmas of taking stem cells from embryos.*" Whether adult stem cell research can offer the same promise as embryonic stem cell research is ultimately a question to be resolved by the biological sciences, not by public opinion research.

11. Three-fourths of voters believe that new treatments for diseases that result from embryonic stem cell research done outside the state should be allowed in Georgia. "*If embryonic stem cell research done outside of Georgia creates new medicines and treatments for diseases*" 75 percent of voters believe that the medicines and treatments should be allowed in Georgia, while only 19 percent believe they should be prohibited. Interestingly, even voters who believe that Georgia should limit research to adult stem cells believe that these treatments should be allowed by a 55 to 34 percent margin.

12. Support from medical organizations increases voter support for therapeutic cloning, while opposition from conservative religious groups has less impact. The statement, "*Therapeutic cloning research is strongly supported by many medical organizations and patient groups including the American Medical Association, the American Diabetes Association, the Christopher Reeves Paralysis Foundation, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, and the Parkinson's Action Network*" makes 48 percent of voters more likely to support therapeutic cloning research, and 12 percent less likely to support it, with 39 percent saying it has no effect on their support.

On the other hand, the statement "*Therapeutic cloning research is strongly opposed by many conservative religious groups including the National Catholic Conference, the National Right-to-Life Association, Focus on the Family, and the Coalition of Americans for Research Ethics*" makes 19 percent of voters more likely to support therapeutic cloning research, 23 percent less likely to support it, and 56 percent saying it has no effect on their support.

Methodology

The sample for the Survey of Georgia Registered Voters Regarding Stem Cell Research, sponsored by the Georgia Biomedical Partnership, consists of 600 respondents drawn randomly from throughout Georgia. Calls were conducted September 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10, 2006. Respondents were selected through random-digit dialing to insure that households with both listed and unlisted telephone numbers are included. Thirty-four percent of the respondents are Republicans, 33 percent are Democrats, and the remainder are Independents or others. Consistent with voter registration statistics, 67 percent of the sample is white, 28 percent is black, and 5 percent is "other/refused." By gender, the sample is 45 percent male and 55 percent female. The sample was also stratified by county according to current registration. The margin of error for the entire sample is plus or minus 4.00 percentage points.