

Missouri voters protect stem-cell research

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ST. LOUIS, Mo. (ABP)—Voters in Missouri Nov. 7 narrowly approved a [constitutional amendment](#) protecting stem-cell research in the state, causing opponents to cite deception and propaganda as the reason for their loss.

Preliminary results show the amendment passed with 51.1 percent of the votes—a winning margin of roughly 47,000 votes.

Much of that support came from urban centers. While voters in 90 of 114 counties rejected the initiative, the large populations in 13 counties and St. Louis, all of which approved it, pushed it through.

Called Amendment 2, or the Missouri Stem Cell Research and Cures Initiative, the measure allows federally funded stem-cell research and treatment, including research using human embryos, in the state of Missouri. Embryonic stem-cell research had previously been allowed in Missouri only on a limited basis.

Opponents to Amendment 2 said supporters deliberately deceived voters by

advertising the measure as a human cloning ban. Amendment 2 bans the process of cloning a live human being but also allows somatic cell nuclear transfer.

In somatic cell nuclear transfer, or therapeutic cloning, researchers replace the nucleus of an unfertilized egg cell with the nucleus of a somatic—or body—cell. After scientists stimulate the egg cell to begin dividing, the additional cells form a blastocyst. The new clump of cells, which contain embryonic stem cells, develops in five days. Somatic cell transfer involves sacrificing the donor embryo in order to create the new cells.

Although the effectiveness of therapeutic cloning remains unproven, researchers believe it could lead to treatment and cures for spinal cord injuries, diabetes and Alzheimer's.

Judie Brown, president of [American Life League](#), said she was “profoundly disappointed” at the vote, adding the opposition “employed dangerous propaganda” to pass the law. Based in Stafford, Va., the American Life League lobbies for “pro-life principles.”

“For the past several months, we have watched the proponents of Amendment 2 slither through the state of Missouri, never telling the truth about what the amendment actually said,” Brown said in a statement issued after the vote. “They said it would ban human cloning, but now Missouri will be cloning human embryos, experimenting on them and then killing them.”

Brown and Amendment 2 opponents were outspent during the campaign by millions of dollars, most of which came from Jim and Virginia Stowers. The Stowers, who founded [Stowers Institute for Medical Research](#), gave \$27 million of the \$28.7 million raised for the pro-research campaign.

In contrast to several large corporate interests supporting Amendment 2, many religious conservatives, including evangelical leaders and the Roman

Catholic Church, vehemently opposed government funding for embryonic stem-cell research.

Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt (R) distanced himself from Republicans by supporting the measure, and the Missouri Baptist Convention stridently campaigned against it. Representatives from the convention were not available to comment.

In a Nov. 8 statement, Tony Perkins, president of the Washington, D.C.-based [Family Research Council](#), which opposes destroying human embryos for research, urged Democrats to remember that, despite their apparent wins in congress, they will have to appeal to conservative voters for years to come—and that could affect how voters view the issue of stem-cell research.

“It was the values gap, scandal and corruption that influenced people when they pulled the lever,” he said. “That revelation may be an inescapable reality for Republicans, but it should serve as a warning to the many Democrats who ... (ran) as pro-life, pro-family candidates. Those integrity voters will be back at the polls in two short years.”

For many like Perkins, the debate has only just begun. Florida, Georgia and Kentucky will likely have similar ballot measures in 2008.

Tony Fabrizio, president of Fabrizio, McLaughlin & Associates who served as chief pollster in Bob Dole's 1996 presidential campaign, said the stem-cell vote doesn't necessarily mean a realignment of conservative voters, so the decision could go the other way in non-Bible Belt states like Florida.

“Never mistake when voters agree with you on a particular issue for realignment,” he said.

Swing voters determined a lot in the election this year, he said. Both conservative and moderate independents tended to vote against

Republicans, who made the 2,000-page amendment more convoluted and complex than needed.

“I think that many voters got caught up in so many other politics out there,” he said. “I think quite frankly people just got confused about what (the amendment) was all about. A lot of Republican candidates have not handled this issue very well.”

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