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Statement by Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney
In Support of Lifting the Ban on Federally Funded Stem Cell Research
July 18, 2006

Mr. Speaker,

It isn't every day that we get to come to the House Floor with the opportunity to save lives. When we voted on HR 810, the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, last year, we were given that very chance.

While the Senate has just passed the bill (HR 810), we must listen to 72% of Americans, the overwhelming majority of scientists, researchers, and even Nobel laureates and vote to ensure that our support for lifting the ban on federal funding for stem cell lines will be preserved.

Right now, only 22 of the 78 stem cell lines approved by President Bush are left. Many of these lines have been contaminated and are no longer useful, but more than 400,000 frozen embryos exist in the United States. With further research, these cells may be used as "replacement" cells and tissues to treat many diseases including Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, AIDS, Lou Gehrig's disease and others.

As a founder and co-chair of the Working Group on Parkinson's Disease and as someone who lost my father to Parkinson's disease, I know firsthand just how important this legislation is and how important it is to open up the stem cell lines. I cannot be more clear: this bill is about saving lives and preventing devastating diseases from ravaging and ending people's lives.

Parkinson's disease is a progressive degenerative brain disease which kills a specialized and vital type of brain cell, a cell which produces the substance dopamine, that is essential for normal movement and balance.

The loss of these dopamine-producing cells causes symptoms, including slowness and paucity of movement, tremor, stiffness, and difficulty walking and balancing, which makes the sufferer unable to carry out the normal activities of daily living.

In 30% of the cases those symptoms include dementia. As the disease progresses, it inflicts horrific physical, emotional, and financial burdens on the patient and family, requiring the caregiver to assist in the activities of daily living, and may eventually lead to placement

in a nursing home until death.

With further research into stem cells, scientists will be able to “reprogram” the stem cells into the dopamine-producing cells which are lost in Parkinson’s disease. One million Americans are afflicted by this terrible disease. This bill will directly help them.

As for the suspensions we are debating today, I have heard Members of the other body claim that they are useless, but harmless. That they don’t do anything to help and that there are no applications of science that they would impact, that “fetal farms” simply don’t exist. Mr. Speaker, we have a bill before us that will save millions of lives and impact millions more.

It’s time that we put the politics aside, listen to the science, and do what’s right.

I urge my colleagues to support HR 810.

Thank you.