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Mesa Republican calling for constitutional cloning ban

Bill could also limit creation of human tissue

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A Mesa Republican legislator wants voters to enact a constitutional ban on cloning without actually defining what would — and would not — be allowed.

Sen. Chuck Gray said his main aim is to ensure that work is not done with the aim of scientifically creating a whole new human being without the natural process of sperm and egg. But he acknowledged the 10-word constitutional amendment in SCR 1005 might also be interpreted to bar research that duplicates cells to create something short of an actual new human being, such as growing skin or muscle tissue.

The actual line, he said, "would be left up to the Legislature" assuming the measure is approved by voters in November.

That possibility alarms Rep. Linda Lopez, D-Tucson. She said it would be wrong to pass what could be a comprehensive ban on what she believes to be legitimate research with only the broad general assurance that lawmakers will figure out what's legal and what's not.

Both legislators start from the premise that "reproductive cloning" is wrong.

"Once you actually create a human embryo that has the ability, implanted in the womb, to grow into a human, you create a human life," Gray said.

He said that should be barred "unless it's done naturally with in vitro fertilization, which is using sperm and an egg."

Lopez agreed. "People don't want another Linda Lopez," the Tucson lawmaker joked.

Less clear is whether the constitutional amendment would — or should — ban what has been called "therapeutic cloning," where cells are altered to create new human tissue.

"When you're talking about cloning skin, you're not cloning a human," Gray said. "You may be cloning part of a human. But, again, all of those definitions need to be decided by the Legislature once the public's weighed in."

Gray acknowledged he made the constitutional amendment deliberately vague.

"If you put all of the details in something and send it to the people, it gets very confusing," he said. "I was trying not to allow the interested scientific parties who want to clone for various financial reasons to interject things that would confuse the public."

The other thing his constitutional amendment lacks is a specific penalty — or, in fact, any penalty at all. That, too, would be up to legislators.

Lopez said that lack of specifics has the potential to create all sorts of problems.

"Human cloning is an incredible science that could help with heart disease and all kinds of neurological

problems," she said.

Lopez said the broad constitutional ban "could really limit the science that's involved in human cloning."

Lopez acknowledged that cloning is seen with suspicion by many in the wake of the creation of Dolly, a sheep who was a duplicate of her mother. That, she said, has alarmed some people that humans may be next.

"There's a real need to educate folks that it's more than creating an exact replica of an existing person," she said. "It's using a person's heart cells to repair damage from a heart attack."

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