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Animal Cloning Horrors

James K. Glassman's column in support of human cloning ["Who's Afraid of Human Cloning?" op-ed, Feb. 10] is grossly misguided and misinformed. Based on a discussion Mr. Glassman had with New York Times reporter Gina Kolata, he insists that Ian Wilmut's animal cloning has not created developmental abnormalities in animals. He is wrong.

Instead of relying on informal conversations he should have checked the congressional testimony of Dr. Wilmut. In his testimony before the Senate's Labor and Human Resources Committee, Dr. Wilmut stated that in some of his cloning experiments, as many as 60 percent of lambs "died soon after birth and showed developmental abnormalities." These results mirror those in many other animal-cloning experiments during the past five years that have resulted in severe birth defects, including an almost doubling in the size of animals being gestated. Citing the "low efficiency" of animal cloning and the severe deformations in many of his cloned

lambs, Dr. Wilmut stated that "it would be quite inhuman to contemplate" human cloning at this stage.

Mr. Glassman further claims that cloning technology has so improved over the past year that Dr. Wilmut's cloning glitches are an "anachronism." Once again, he's wrong. In fact, recent reports indicate that researchers cannot even replicate Dr. Wilmut's cloning experiments, much less improve upon them. Mr. Glassman's mistakes of fact and misplaced technological optimism cannot hide the very real possibility that human cloning could create thousands of children born with significant birth abnormalities. Mr. Glassman and others in the academic and biotechnology community have so far successfully argued against a congressional ban on human cloning. I wonder how they intend to deal with the wave of grief-stricken mothers and fathers of the failed human cloning experiments that they advocate.

Mr. Glassman's last-ditch argument against the ban on human cloning is that it will halt lifesaving

medical research. A review of all the cloning bills before Congress reveals that not a single one would halt the cloning of human cells or tissues required for such research. They would prohibit only the cloning of human embryos and children. Finally, Mr. Glassman's assertion that banning human cloning would halt the possibility of human clones being used to "grow new organs to replace damaged ones" is surely one of the best arguments for such a ban.

Neither the shortsighted pursuit of profit by the biotech and infertility industry nor the specious arguments of cloning's new evangelists should prevent Congress from quickly banning human cloning. We should join 19 European countries and numerous others around the world that have had the courage and foresight to just say no to human cloning.

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