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The Floodgate is Now Open — President Obama and the Vulnerable Embryo

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President Barack Obama today signed an executive order that reverses the Bush administration's restrictions on federal funding for research that involves the destruction of human embryos. In a White House ceremony, President Obama said that Americans "have come to a consensus that we should pursue this research; that the potential it offers is great, and with proper guidelines and strict oversight the perils can be avoided."

The President made a campaign promise to take this action, but in the weeks just after his inauguration he had made comments suggesting that he would prefer for Congress to lift the Bush restrictions by legislation. Nevertheless, today's White House ceremony was thoroughly orchestrated and media had advance notice as of last Friday.

The President's new policy means that federal funding will now go to researchers whose work with human embryonic stem cells involves the destruction of additional human embryos. This represents a monumental moral shift. The United States government is now in the business of supporting the destruction of human embryos through federal funding of stem cell research.

President Obama spoke to the moral issues involved when he stated: "Many thoughtful and decent people are conflicted about, or strongly oppose, this research. I understand their concerns, and we must respect their point of view."

But the President clearly does not share these concerns, and it is unclear what he means by respecting the point of view of those who rightly understand the issue as tax-supported homicide.

The President also appeared to suggest that Congress should lift other restrictions, though he did not directly call for a repeal of the Dickey-Wicker amendment, which prohibits some forms of research funded by the federal government.

President Obama is now personally responsible for research that will involve the intentional destruction of human embryos. This comes even as the ideological roots of this conflict have become increasingly clear. Credible alternatives to research that would require the destruction of human embryos have become available, even as the most promising avenues of medical research are now using adult stem cells, which avoids the moral issues involved in the use of human embryos.

The scientific community increasingly appears to have drawn a line in the sand on this issue. The insistence that embryos must be destroyed is a matter of ideology. Some researchers seem to resist any alternative source of stem cells, no matter how great its potential.

President Obama pledged to support research "with proper guidelines and strict oversight," but his own policy removes the guidelines that protected the embryo. The President said he would hold the line by opposing human



reproductive cloning, but this is a line he will find difficult to hold or to defend.

And when President Obama spoke of “strict oversight,” he offered no assurance of what this might mean. Even more troubling, with his announcement of reversing the Bush policy the President also issued an official White House statement indicating that he would shield scientific policy from political considerations.

One of his most influential scientific advisors, Harold Varmus, told *The Washington Post*, “This is consistent with the president’s determination to use sound scientific practice, responsible practice of science and evidence, instead of dogma in developing federal policy.”

The “instead of dogma” language is a direct criticism of the Bush administration policies. President Obama delivered a rebuke to the Bush administration in this new statement of policy, but the new President is either disingenuous or deceptive when he suggests that science can ever be free from political considerations. Science does not happen in a vacuum. Scientific research takes place in a social and political context, and when the federal government is involved through funding of that research, such research is intensely political. The space race was fueled by the ideological context of the Cold War. Decisions about research priorities and policies is hotly political. So is President Obama’s new policy that will lead to the destruction of more human embryos.

Those wondering when President Obama would make a clear move on a matter that involves the sanctity of human life now have their answer — and its consequences. When President Obama says he will “respect” the point of view that such research is immoral, his respect is hard to detect.

When human embryos are destroyed in the name of medical advancement, we make a deal with the Culture of Death and sacrifice embryonic human beings for the hope of medical advances. We all hope and pray for those advances, and for treatments to cure or treat intractable diseases. But there are valid alternatives to the use of human embryos.

The vulnerable human embryo is now at greater risk than ever before. And this, inevitably, means that every single human life is devalued by this decision.

