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FLOOR DEBATE

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SENATOR BROWN: Mr. President, members, I support the motion to recommit, because with this bill, we are talking about not just criminalizing action, but criminalizing knowledge. We are talking not just about criminalizing the creation of life for our own purposes; we are talking about criminalizing the possibility of medical miracles. Now, some of you will know that I am not new to this area, and not new to the ethical issues that are presented by the brave new world that we have. But I also don't say that I know everything, or even very much. What I know is that we don't know everything and we don't know very much. All the reports that I have read from the scientific community about emerging research opportunities and their ethical considerations advise us to move forward slowly, but to move forward. As Senator Johnson said, even President Bush's Council on Bioethics has recommended neutrality. And I will read from you a particular section. We have tried to provide an overview of the ethical and policy debate surrounding stem cell research--and we are talking about somatic cell nuclear transfer, which is a slightly different issue, but is very related to stem cell, and we'll probably talk about that more later--the ethical and policy debate surrounding stem cell research in the past two years. As you already know quite well, these are immensely difficult and challenging matters, with obligations owed to nascent human life pitted against obligations to seek knowledge that might someday alleviate much human suffering. Not surprisingly, arguments continue on all aspects of the moral and political debate. We have sought to present the arguments and counterarguments faithfully and accurately, so that all may learn what is at stake and where the debate now stands. We must continue to have the debate. We must continue to weigh the ethical considerations. But I don't want to criminalize that knowledge. I don't want to criminalize that continued debate. I'm...Senator Chambers started on a line that I'm not sure that the sponsors of this bill can go very far down, and that is the definition of an embryo. Because in all the research that I have done, based on our past knowledge, almost every definition for embryo includes the word fertilization or conception. We are not here talking about fertilization or conception. We are not even talking about something that on its own begins to divide. Is that an embryo in the traditional sense? Do we throw out all the definitions?