



## **Backgrounder**

### **“We Need a New NIH Director”**

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*Dr. Francis Collins has served as NIH Director since mid-2009. He was nominated by President Obama, after Collins had served as an advisor to Obama during his 2008 campaign and on his transition team.*

### **Francis Collins does not have pro-life views.**

- **Collins supports human embryonic stem cell research**, including the sacrifice and destruction of “leftover” human embryos from fertility clinics. Collins helped develop President Obama’s policy on embryonic stem-cell research. After his confirmation as NIH Director, Collins noted that setting up a new human embryonic stem cell registry was a high priority. In 2010, he fought against an attempt (Sherley vs. Sebelius) to stop federal taxpayer funding of embryonic stem-cell research, including filing a declaration in the case in support of federal funding (Case 1:09-cv-01575-RCL Document 48-2 Filed 08/31/10).
- **Collins supports human cloning** (somatic cell nuclear transfer) for research, i.e., to create human embryos to be destroyed for their embryonic stem cells (“clone and kill”).
- **Collins supports creation of ethically-questionable human-animal chimeras**; under his leadership, NIH is preparing to approve and fund chimeras, including those that contain human gametes (eggs or sperm) or a human brain, in an animal.

## **Detailed Background**

### **Collins issued statement that he was pleased at ending of legal challenge to federal funding of human embryonic stem cell research**

“I am very pleased with today's decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to decline to review the Sherley v. Sebelius U.S. Court of Appeals ruling. This decision allows the ruling to stand, and enables NIH to continue conducting and funding stem cell research...”<sup>1</sup>

### **Collins in favor of federally funded human embryonic stem cell research at Congressional hearing, against Sherley vs. Sebelius injunction stopping federal embryonic stem cell funds**

"Human embryonic stem cells remain the gold standard for pluripotency," Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, said at the hearing.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/nih-director/statements/statement-nih-director-francis-s-collins-md-phd-supreme-courts-decision-regarding-stem-cell-case>; Jan 6, 2013.

Collins and others argue not just for a permanent removal of the injunction to resume research with confidence, but also for an extension of the number of embryonic stem cell lines available to federally funded researchers. He noted that even the Obama administration's 75 approved stem cell lines (increased from the Bush administration's 21) are not enough for robust research in the field.<sup>2</sup>

**Collins supports human embryonic stem cell research as “important, life-saving research,” *Nature* story, though zero lives have been saved with embryonic stem cells**

During a court case involving NIH funding of human embryonic stem cell research, Collins has said, "We are pleased with the Court's interim ruling, which will allow this important, life-saving research to continue while we present further arguments to the Court in the weeks to come."<sup>3</sup>

**Collins advised Obama and helped develop current open funding for human embryonic stem cell research, *AP* story**

“He left NIH last year to, among other things, work with Barack Obama's presidential campaign...

Also look for an emphasis on stem cell research. Under President Barack Obama's new policy on embryonic stem cells, which Collins helped develop, the agency now is deciding which of the 700 known embryonic stem cell batches, or ‘lines,’ are eligible for taxpayer-funded research.”<sup>4</sup>

**Collins interview with *Nature* science journal, on first day as NIH director says human embryonic stem cells a high priority**

Francis Collins, the new director of the US National Institutes of Health, says that he had no timetable for when the NIH will re-establish a registry listing human embryonic stem cell lines eligible for human research funding. He did, however, say that the registry would be a “very high priority.”<sup>5</sup>

The NIH Human Embryonic Stem Cell Registry was created and is publicly available.<sup>6</sup>

**Collins began approving more human embryonic stem cell research soon after appointment as NIH director, *Washington Post* interview**

The Obama administration has begun approving new lines of human embryonic stem cells that are eligible for federally funded experiments, opening the way for millions of taxpayer dollars to be used to conduct research that was put off-limits by President George W. Bush.

"This is the first down payment on what is going to be a much longer list that will empower the scientific community to explore the potential of embryonic stem cell research," said NIH Director Francis S. Collins. "Today's announcement is the first wave."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/stem-cell-funding/>; Sept 18, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nature.com/news/2010/100914/full/467258a.html>; September 14, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> [http://web.archive.org/web/20090820182548/http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090817/ap\\_on\\_re\\_us/us\\_nih\\_chief](http://web.archive.org/web/20090820182548/http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090817/ap_on_re_us/us_nih_chief); Aug 17, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> [http://web.archive.org/web/20150912043958/http://blogs.nature.com/theniche/2009/08/nih\\_chief\\_first\\_day\\_stem\\_cell.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20150912043958/http://blogs.nature.com/theniche/2009/08/nih_chief_first_day_stem_cell.html); Aug 18, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> [https://grants.nih.gov/stem\\_cells/registry/current.htm](https://grants.nih.gov/stem_cells/registry/current.htm) (scroll to end for most recent additions).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/12/02/AR2009120201955.html>; Dec 3, 2009.

**Collins defended human embryonic stem cell research, supported Obama order, *Christian Post***

“In the book, Collins also defended research on existing embryonic stem cells, though he has expressed opposition to purposely creating them for research. Collins was present during the signing of an Executive Order by President Obama that reversed the government's ban on funding stem-cell research back in March.”<sup>8</sup>

**Collins interview with *New England Journal of Medicine*, ignores the successes of treatments using non-embryonic stem cells**

“Steinbrook: What will the results of stem-cell research mean for human health?

Collins: My crystal ball is just as cloudy as everyone else's. However, the developments in understanding stem cells and how they could potentially be brought to bear for a whole host of medical problems are some of the more exciting things that have happened in the last decade. In terms of therapeutics, we are just so early on. The one clinical trial approved by the Food and Drug Administration - for spinal cord injury - is currently on hold.”<sup>9</sup>

CLI's most recent fact sheet on adult stem cell therapies, including links to FDA-approved clinical trials and peer-reviewed research from 2006 onwards, highlights the successes of treatments using non-embryonic stem cells.<sup>10</sup>

**Collins in *PBS* interview supports embryonic stem cells from cloning (somatic cell nuclear transfer)**

“ABERNETHY: Not far behind, says Collins, is the development of drugs for Alzheimer's and Lou Gehrig's disease, asthma and diabetes. Collins is also a strong supporter of stem cell research, and he thinks there's a way to do this that, for him, removes the moral objections to destroying a human embryo. Collins favors what's called somatic cell nuclear transfer, in which the nucleus of an egg is replaced by the nucleus of, for instance, a cell of skin.

“Dr. COLLINS: Now that is very different in my mind, morally, than the union of sperm and egg. We do not in nature see somatic cell nuclear transfer occurring. This is a purely manmade event. And yet somehow we have attached to the product of that kind of activity the same moral status as the union of sperm and egg. I don't know quite how we got there.”<sup>11</sup>

**Collins in *Discover* interview says cloned embryo not an embryo, supports cloning for research**

Interviewer: “You're a born-again Christian who suggests that therapeutic cloning could be acceptable. Some other devout people consider it fundamentally immoral. What do you see differently?”

Collins: There is a difference between doing research on an embryo that was generated by sperm and egg coming together, which is the way human beings are created, versus the very bizarre laboratory phenomenon of taking a nucleus from a skin cell or the udder cell of a sheep and

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20090528/theistic-evolutionist-francis-collins-eyed-to-lead-nih/index.html>; May 28, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMp0905046>; October 1, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> <https://lozierinstitute.org/fact-sheet-adult-stem-cell-research-transplants/>; August 10, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week947/profile.html>; July 21, 2006.

putting it into an environment that takes it back in time to its stem cell state. In public discourse, they're both called embryos. Even though the somatic cell nuclear transfer approach is a very different biological phenomenon, in many people's minds it has been all blurred together. As a result, we've really missed out on a chance for a much more thoughtful, nuanced discussion, and we're still trying to recover from that."<sup>12</sup>

**Collins supports research and destruction of “excess” embryos for their stem cells, and supports cloning (somatic cell nuclear transfer) of human embryos for research, PBS interview**

“So I think one thing we ought to do is, sort of, tone down the rhetoric and try to get our scientific facts straight. So stem cells-- there's lots of different kinds of stem cells. The kind that I think many people are most concerned about are the ones that are derived from a human embryo which is produced by a sperm and an egg coming together. The way you and I got here. There are hundreds of thousands of those embryos currently frozen away in *in vitro* fertilization clinics. And it is absolutely unrealistic to imagine that anything will happen to those other than they're eventually getting discarded. So as much as I think human embryos deserve moral status, it is hard to see why it's more ethical to throw them away than to take some that are destined for discarding and do something that might help somebody.

“But as a scientist -- I would say we are currently not making as much progress as we could if we had access to more of these stem cell lines. The ones that are currently available for federal funding is a very limited set and they clearly have flaws that make them hard to use. But you know what? I think that kind of stem cell research is actually not the part that's going to be most interesting.

“The part that's really showing the most promise is to take a skin cell from you or me and convince that cell, which has the complete genome, to go back in time and become capable of making a liver cell or a brain cell or a blood -- cell if you need it to. That's reprogramming. That's called [somatic] cell nuclear transfer in the current mode. And yet people still refer to those products as an embryo. Well, there's no sperm and egg involved here.”<sup>13</sup>

**Collins supports destroying “excess” IVF embryos for their embryonic stem cells, supports cloning (somatic cell nuclear transfer) of human embryos for research, Salon interview**

“Stem cells have been discussed for 10 years, and yet I fear that much of that discussion has been more heat than light. First of all, I believe that the product of a sperm and an egg, which is the first cell that goes on to develop a human being, deserves considerable moral consequences. This is an entity that ultimately becomes a human. So I would be opposed to the idea of creating embryos by mixing sperm and eggs together and then experimenting on the outcome of that, purely to understand research questions. On the other hand, there are hundreds of thousands of such embryos in freezers at *in vitro* fertilization clinics. In the process of *in vitro* fertilization, you almost invariably end up with more embryos than you can reimplant safely. The plausibility of those ever being reimplanted in the future -- more than a few of them -- is extremely low. Is it more ethical to leave them in those freezers forever or throw them away? Or is it more ethical to

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<sup>12</sup> <http://discovermagazine.com/2007/feb/interview-francis-collins>; February 20, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/thinktank/transcript1282.html>; September 16, 2007.

come up with some sort of use for those embryos that could help people? I think that's not been widely discussed.”

“Yeah, it's called cloning, which is a very unfortunate term because it conjures up the idea that you're trying to create a copy of that human being. And at this point, you're doing nothing of the sort. You're trying to create a cell line that could be used to substitute for something that a person desperately needs. It would only become a cloned person if you then intentionally decided to take those cells and reimplant them in the uterus of a recipient woman. And that, obviously, is something that we should not and must not [do] and probably should legislate against. But until you get to that point, it's not clear to me that you're dealing with something that deserves to be called an embryo or deserves to be given moral status.”<sup>14</sup>

**Collins in his book redefines cloned (nuclear transfer) embryos because clones do not occur in nature**

“I would argue that the immediate product of a skin cell and an enucleated egg cell fall[s] short of the moral status of the union of sperm and egg. The former is a creation in the laboratory that does not occur in nature, and is not part of God’s plan to create a human individual. The latter is very much God’s plan, carried out through the millennia by our own species and many others.”<sup>15</sup>

**Collins supports proposed changes to NIH guidelines to allow taxpayer funding for the creation of human-animal chimeras**

NIH solicited comments for the proposal, which would include approving and allowing taxpayer funding of research in which there “could be a substantial contribution or a substantial functional modification to the animal brain by the human cells.”<sup>16</sup>

CLI submitted comments to the NIH in September 2016 opposing this proposal.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.salon.com/2006/08/07/collins\\_6/](http://www.salon.com/2006/08/07/collins_6/); August 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God* (Free Press, NY), 2006; p. 256.

<sup>16</sup> <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-16-128.html>; August 4, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> <https://lozierinstitute.org/cli-comment-on-nih-proposal-to-fund-human-animal-chimeras/>; September 7, 2016.