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Text of Ron Reagan's convention speech

A text of Ron Reagan's speech as prepared for delivery Tuesday at the Democratic National Convention:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

A few of you may be surprised to see someone with my last name showing up to speak at a Democratic convention. Let me assure you, I am not here to make a political speech, and the topic at hand should notmust norhave anything to do with partisanship.

I am here tonight to talk about the issue of research into what may be the greatest medical breakthrough in our or in any lifetime: the use of embryonic stem cells - cells created using the material of our own bodies - to cure a wide range of fatal and debilitating illnesses: Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, lymphoma, spinal cord injuries, and much more. Millions are afflicted. Every year, every day, tragedy is visited upon families across the country, around the world.

Now, we may be able to put an end to this suffering. We only need to try. Some of you already know what I'm talking about when I say "embryonic stem cell research." Others of you are probably thinking, "Hmm, thats quite a mouthful, what is this all about?"

Let me try and paint as simple a picture as I can while still doing justice to the incredible science involved. Let's say that ten or so years from now you are diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. There is currently no cure and drug therapy, with its attendant side-effects, can only temporarily relieve the symptoms.

Now, imagine going to a doctor who, instead of prescribing drugs, takes a few skin cells from your arm. The nucleus of one of your cells is placed into a donor egg whose own nucleus has been removed. A hit of chemical or electrical stimulation will encourage your cell's nucleus to begin dividing, creating new cells which will then be placed into a tissue culture. Those cells will generate embryonic stem cells containing only your DNA, thereby eliminating the risk of tissue rejection. These stem cells are then driven to become the very neural cells that are defective in Parkinson's patients. And finally, those cells - with your DNA - are injected into your brain where they will replace the faulty cells whose failure to produce adequate dopamine led to the Parkinson's disease in the first place.

In other words, you're cured. And another thing, these embryonic stem cells, they could continue to replicate indefinitely and, theoretically, can be induced to recreate virtually any tissue in your body. How'd you like to have your own personal biological repair kit standing by at the hospital? Sound like magic? Welcome to the future of medicine.

By the way, no fetal tissue is involved in this process. No fetuses are created, none destroyed. This all happens in the laboratory at the cellular level.

Now, there are those who would stand in the way of this remarkable future, who would deny the federal funding so crucial to basic research. They argue that interfering with the development of even the earliest stage embryo, even one that will never he implanted in a womb and will never develop into an actual fetus, is tantamount to murder. A few of these folks, needless to say, are just grinding a political axe and they should he ashamed of themselves. But many are well-meaning and sincere. Their belief is just that, an article of faith, and they are entitled to it.

But it does not follow that the theology of a few should be allowed to forestall the health and well-being of the many. And how can we affirm life if we abandon those whose own lives are so desperately at risk?

It is a hallmark of human intelligence that we are able to make distinctions. Yes, these cells could theoretically have the potential, under very different circumstances, to develop into human beings - that potential is where their magic lies. But they are not, in and of themselves, human beings. They have no fingers and toes, no brain or spinal cord. They have no thoughts, no fears. They feel no pain. Surely we can distinguish between these undifferentiated cells multiplying in a tissue culture and a living, breathing person - parent, a spouse, a child.

I know a child - well, she must be 13 now - I'd better call her a young woman. She has fingers and toes. She has a mind. She has memories. She has hopes. And she has juvenile diabetes.

Like so many kids with this disease, she has adjusted amazingly well. The insulin pump she wears - she's decorated hers with rhinestones. She can insert her own catheter needle. She has learned to sleep through the blood drawings in the wee hours of the morning. She's very brave. She is also quite bright and understands full well the progress of her disease and what that might ultimately mean: blindness, amputation, diabetic coma. Every day, she fights to have a future.

What excuse will we offer this young woman should we fail her now? What might we tell her children? Or the millions of others who suffer? That when given an opportunity to help, we turned away? That facing political opposition, we lost our nerve? That even though we knew better, we did nothing?

And, should we fail, how will we feel if, a few years from now, a more enlightened generation should fulfill the promise of embryonic stem cell therapy? Imagine what they would say of us who lacked the will.

No, we owe this young woman and all those who suffer - we owe ourselves - better than that. We are better than that. A wiser people, a finer nation. And for all of us in this fight, let me say: we will prevail.

The tide of history is with us. Like all generations who have come before ours, we are motivated by a thirst for knowledge and compelled to see others in need as fellow angels on an often difficult path, deserving of our compassion.

In a few months, we will face a choice. Yes, between two candidates and two parties, but more than that. We have a chance to take a giant stride forward for the good of all humanity. We can choose between the future and the past, between reason and ignorance, between true compassion and mere ideology. This is our moment, and we must not falter.

Whatever else you do come November 2nd, I urge you, please, cast a vote for embryonic stem cell research. Thank you for your time.