

**“Cures not Clones” Briefing
Sponsored by Americans to Ban Cloning
562 Dirksen Senate Office Building
April 10, 2002**

**Joni Eareckson Tada
Director Emeritus, Christian Council on Persons with Disabilities**

Research Cloning from a Disability Perspective

My heart goes out to newly injured people who have suffered spinal cord damage. No one understands better their desire for a cure than me. Thirty five years ago when I broke my neck and became a quadriplegic, I was desperate for anything **B** “please, doctors, researchers, do anything” **B** that would repair my spinal cord and give me back use of my legs and hands. Acute disability does that: it screams for reprieve, demanding that a cure be gained at *any* cost.

Thirty five years later, my perspective has changed. Time makes one look at the broader implications **B** not how embryonic stem cell research would impact the individual, but society as a whole. Yes, my husband and I still encourage spinal cord injury research and cure, but not to the degree that the *benefits* of a possible cure outweigh the *serious and permanent consequences*.

For me, and tens of thousands of people with disabilities, the security of human dignity and respect for human life is paramount to securing a cure. The rights of people with disabilities **B** especially those who are disadvantaged and weak **B** are safeguarded in a society that honors life and treats humanity with respect. However, the weak and infirm are exposed in a society that thinks nothing of creating a class of human lives for the explicit purpose of exploitation. This is the Pandora’s Box that research cloning would open. Ironically, the disabled would be the first to be threatened in a world where eugenics and the bio-tech industry set the moral agenda. It’s an impersonal world that uses the guise of “cure” while devaluing the very human life it purports to help.

Historically, people with disabilities have *never* fared well in utilitarian societies, where right versus wrong doesn’t count but only whether or not “it will work.” One prominent pro-cloning advocate, in his testimony before the Senate, said that “the duty of government is to do the greatest good for the greatest number” **B** yet it was this ideology which paved the way for the extermination of hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities in World War II. Rather, the duty of government is to safeguard the rights of the weak and marginalized; in so doing, the rights of all are upheld. This strikes at the heart of the cloning debate. If we criminalize the care and nurturing of an entire class of human beings **B** as would be the case if experimental cloning were legalized **B** then the character of our helping society would erode.

As a person with a disability, that’s not the kind of world I want. I do not want research benefitting me at the expense of other human life. I do not want a society that establishes in law a class of embryos that it is a crime *not* to destroy. I don’t want valuable resources, now dedicated to safe and promising adult stem cell research, to be diverted for cloning experimentation. There are scientific data showing that stem cells can be obtained from the blood of the umbilical cord, from neural tissue, bone marrow and skin cells.

I join countless Americans with disabilities in deploring the “harvesting” of human life; I find it shameful that some of my associates with disabilities are using their physical impairment as a plea to promote research cloning, and I am offended that words like “helpless victim” and “being trapped in a useless body” are used to sway the sympathies of legislators. Rather, let us influence our society with reasoned judgment, strength of character, and a commitment to improve our culture, not diminish it.

I encourage disabled people, their families and friends to say no to cloning and persuade the Senate to pass the Brownback-Landrieu bill.

