Cell Debate June 25, 2007 The debate in Washington has again turned to federal funding of stem cell research, with President Bush moving to veto legislation passed recently by Congress. Those engaged in this debate tend to split into warring camps claiming exclusive moral authority to decide the issue once and for all. On one side, those who support the President's veto tend to argue against embryonic stem cell research, pointing to the individual rights of the embryo being discarded for use in research. On the other hand are those who argue the embryo will be discarded any way, and the research may provide valuable cures for people suffering from terrible illnesses. In Washington, these two camps generally advocate very different policies. The first group wants a federal ban on all such research, while the latter group expects the research to be federally-subsidized. Neither side in this battle seems to consider the morality surrounding the rights of federal taxpayers. Our founding fathers devised a system of governance that limited federal activity very narrowly. In doing so, they intended to keep issues such as embryonic stem cell research entirely out of Washington's hands. They believed issues such as this should be tackled by free people acting freely in their churches and medical associations, and in the marketplace that would determine effective means of research. When government policies on this issue were to be developed, our founders would have left them primarily to state legislators to decide in accord with community standards. Their approach was also the only one consistent with a concern for the rights and freedom of all individuals, and for limiting negative impacts upon taxpayers. When Washington subsidizes something, it does so at the direct expense of the taxpayer. Likewise, when Washington bans something, it generally requires a federal agency and a team of federal agents— often heavily-armed federal agents—to enforce the ban. These agencies become the means by which the citizenry is harassed by government intrusions. Yet it is the mere existence of these agencies, and the attendant costs associated with operating them, that leads directly to the abuse of the taxpayers' pocketbooks. If Congress attempts to override the President's veto, I will support the President. As a physician, I am well aware that certain stem cells have significant medical potential and do not raise the moral dilemmas presented by embryonic stem cell research. My objection is focused on the issue of federal funding. Unfortunately, in the Washington environment of "either subsidize it, or else ban it," it is unlikely there will be much focus given to the issue of federal funding. Instead, virulent charges will fly regarding who is willing to sacrifice the lives and health of others to make a political point. Only when Washington comes to understand that our founders expressly intended for our federal government to be limited in scope, will policy questions such as this be rightly understood. But that understanding will not come until the people demand their elected officials act in accordance with these principles.