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Co-host of NBC's Today Only Worried That Ban on Embryo Destruction Ends "Potential to Save Lives"

Katie Couric's One-Sided Stem Cell Questions

Don't fall out of your chair, but CBS' Bryant Gumbel and ABC's Diane Sawyer both managed a little balance this morning in their coverage of President George W. Bush's decision to allow federal funding of limited embryonic stem cell research but not the further destruction of human embryos.

But in her interviews with four different guests, Today's Katie Couric never once questioned the President's policy from a pro-life perspective. The NBC star's only concern was that research efforts might be slowed by Bush's restrictions, and she scoffed at pro-life Senator Sam Brownback's unease over using cells from destroyed human embryos.

First up was Bush aide Karen Hughes, who heard from Couric that "many members of the scientific community are sorely disappointed with the decision because they say it severely limits research. It will take much, much longer to actually treat the people this scientific research can potentially save. What is your response to scientists who say, 'he's really tied our hands here?'"

Couric pushed Hughes from the left a second time: "Of course, many of these frozen embryos will be discarded because they won't be needed, so they'll be thrown in a dumpster anyway. Does it trouble President Bush that these things are being thrown away when they have the potential to save lives?"

Finally, Couric read a statement from Tom Daschle expressing "concern...that the existing stem cell lines could be inadequate to realize its potential lifesaving benefits." She asked Hughes if she thought Congress would overrule the President and "expand the potential for research?"

She then interviewed actor Michael J. Fox, who has lobbied for full federal funding of embryonic stem cell research as a way to combat the Parkinson's Disease from which he suffers. Couric did not challenge Fox to justify the sacrifice of human embryos. Instead, she invited Fox to condemn Bush's decision as inadequate, asking "what

about, Michael, the fact that frozen embryos that were, in which stem cells have not been culled so far, will be off limits?" Then, "for embryonic stem cell research advocates like yourself, where do you go from here?"

To Senator Brownback, an opponent of federally-funded embryo destruction, Couric assumed he was pleased. "I know that you're welcoming President Bush's decision on this," she greeted him. But when Brownback said he was concerned about the morality of using cells from destroyed embryos,

Couric was shocked. "Senator Brownback," she protested, "they've already been destroyed. I mean, is it a moot point now that the stem cells have actually already been culled? He is not calling for the destruction of any other embryos."

Turning finally to stem cell researcher Dr. John Gearhart,

Couric continued with the sympathetic tone she had struck with Fox. "How much will research be slowed down if new stem cells cannot be harvested from the frozen embryos that currently exist?" she wondered.

In contrast, ABC's Sawyer challenged Karen Hughes from both sides. Like Couric, she worried about the research consequences: "Michael J. Fox, Chris Reeve and others have said, 'Sixty lines, great, go ahead and explore those, but what if it's the sixty-first line that holds the cure for Parkinson's, Alzheimer's? Has the door been shut on that?'" But, echoing Brownback, she also asked about the ethics of using cells from innocent embryos: "The opponents of this say...life has been destroyed and it would be like saying, 'I oppose murder, but if you've already murdered somebody, then I'm going to go ahead and use the organs for transplants.'" Good question, and one scoffed at by Katie Couric. — Rich Noyes

Even Gumbel Asked Question From the Right:

"Mary, I know how you feel about this issue. What do you say to those who look at this from a different point of view and see it as a sanctity of life issue and see any research on any embryos as doing nothing more than treating life as a commodity?" — Gumbel to embryonic stem cell research advocate Mary Tyler Moore.

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