

L E T T E R S

O.U. Firm on Stem Cell

A May 21 article suggesting that the Orthodox Union has made a "decision to mute its opposition to [President] Bush[']s policy] on stem cells" could not be more inaccurate.

The O.U.'s position on this matter, developed in collaboration with the Rabbinical Council of America by a special panel of rabbis, scientists and other community leaders that we convened, clearly states our support for this potentially life-saving research and that it should be supported by federal funding. In fact, among the Jewish community's national religious and public policy organizations, we were the first to enunciate this position, which clearly differs from Bush's policy decision of August 2001. We stood by it then, and we stand by it now.

Moreover, while the article accurately reported our perception that "the president is not going to change his policy," lobbying the White House is not the only means by which one might seek to alter this policy. Toward this end, the O.U. has endorsed and actively supports legislation sponsored by Senators Arlen Specter, Edward Kennedy, Orrin Hatch and Dianne Feinstein, which would overturn the president's policy and provide federal funding for such research.

The O.U., joined by the Union of Reform Judaism, spearheaded the effort to put the entire organized community on record in support of this position by proposing a resolution embodying this policy at the most recent conference of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, a resolution that passed unanimously. We have worked more informally toward this goal, as well, in conversations with elected officials, biotech industry leaders and others.

In matters of public policy, the O.U. prides itself on serving the interests and values of the Orthodox Jewish community, and other allied communities, by promoting initiatives on the basis of the honest interpretation of our tradition's teachings. Our most valuable asset in this regard is fidelity to our principles without regard for partisan politics. On the matter of stem-cell research, as others, we continue to follow this path.

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