

Statement of

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*To the
Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space
of the
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation*

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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to address the issue of cloning.

President Bush quoted only one thinker in his unadorned—and quite effective—State of the Union address two months ago: Yogi Berra. The president commended to his congressional audience Mr. Berra's famous dictum, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it."

The president was preaching to the choir. American politicians don't like having to make difficult choices. Who can blame them? They have to balance diverse interests and juggle competing demands while doing justice to differing views among the citizens they represent. To govern is to choose, we're sometimes told. But, often, to govern in a big, pluralistic democracy like ours is *not* to choose, or not to choose too starkly, certainly not to choose irrevocably. After all, lots of choices are false choices; lots of bold decisions turn out badly. Avoiding forks in the road often isn't a bad idea.

George W. Bush knows this. After all, he's neither a conservative nor a moderate—he's a compassionate conservative. He wants to cut taxes—but also to increase government spending. He wants to cut back regulations—but also to reassure environmentalists. He wants to strengthen our commitment to Taiwan—but also to work with Beijing. All of this is reasonable enough. And it's characteristic of politics in a Madisonian republic.

But a Madisonian republic has its Lincolnian moments. Occasionally, there really *is* a fork in the road. Occasionally, to govern *is* to choose—and not to choose is not to govern. Two generations ago, we had to choose whether to overcome segregation and discrimination. Under Lyndon Johnson's leadership, we made that choice. One generation ago, we had to choose whether we would try to overcome Communism abroad. Ronald Reagan led us in making that choice.

Today, we face a decision at least as momentous: whether we stumble heedlessly into a brave new world of eugenic enhancement and technological manufacture of human beings, or whether we will avert such a future. President Bush will lead us—or will fail to lead us—in that choice.

We are at an extraordinary moment of scientific progress, and scientific peril. The genetic revolution offers great hope for the medical treatment of disease, through gene therapy and other forms of healing. But if this revolution is not subject to human guidance and limitation,

it will produce consequences that will be detrimental—no, devastating—to human liberty and human dignity.

These consequences have been laid out in detail, and the arguments against them made with great distinction, by thinkers ranging from Hans Jonas and Paul Ramsey a few decades ago to Leon Kass and Gilbert Meilaender today. But for current, practical purposes, our political leaders do not have to have studied all these arguments. All our politicians have to do now is to realize that, if they do not call a halt to certain experiments, if they do not limit the “progress” of science in certain ways, it will be virtually impossible to do so later. “Containment” is necessary now if we are to have a hope for a humane future later. Perhaps we who fear that the programmed reproduction of man will dehumanize him are wrong. Still, as a nation we surely owe ourselves, and our descendants, a serious debate before we march blindly down one fork of the road.

But isn't it hopeless? Doesn't modernity mean that technology always trumps politics? Isn't scientific “progress” unstoppable?

No. No more than Communist domination of half the world was unstoppable, or that the further use of nuclear weapons after 1945 was unstoppable. No more than racial bigotry was unchangeable.

And in any case, to bow to the inevitability of this kind of scientific “progress” is to give up on the core of the American experiment: “that honorable determination,” as Madison put it in Federalist #39, “to rest all our political experiments on the capacity of mankind for self-government.” Science and technology may pose an even greater challenge to this determination than did slavery or communism. But to succumb is to forego our claim to self-government.

What, now, is to be done? The cloning of human beings is on the horizon. Ban it. Mr. Chairman, you have introduced carefully drafted legislation to prohibit all human cloning. The legislation deserves the support of serious political leaders in both parties.

President Bush has spoken eloquently about his hope of ushering in a new “responsibility era.” What greater responsibility do we have than halting a brave new world—one that, to quote Leon Kass, would put “human nature itself on the operating table, ready for alteration, ‘enhancement,’ and wholesale redesign?” A ban on human cloning would only be a first step down the road of responsibility and self-government—but it would be an important first step.

Yogi Berra and George W. Bush are both baseball fans. The superiority of baseball to football is beautifully captured by one of Mr. Berra's insights: Baseball “ain't like football. You can't make up no trick plays.” There are no trick plays for politicians in the area of bioethics. President Bush—and our other political leaders--will have to step up to the plate and vindicate the capacity of mankind for self-government.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and the committee.