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CNN LARRY KING LIVE

Encore Presentation: Interview With George W. Bush, Laura Bush

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KING: Nancy Reagan has come out very strong for embryonic stem cell research. I was at that dinner when she came out. She told me the other night she expects to speak more on the subject. Her son spoke very strongly about it at the Democratic convention. And the picture is that you are opposed to embryonic stem cell research, which many scientists say will provide many answers, not just to Alzheimer's, but Parkinson's, diabetes and others. What is your position?

B. BUSH: Well, I'm...

KING: And you have been speaking out.

L. BUSH: I have been speaking out, because there's not a ban on stem cell research. And that seems to be the buzzword now that you would read in the press. And the fact is, the president is the one who -- is the only person who's authorized any research on embryonic stem cell, and several countries have a complete ban on embryonic stem cell research.

KING: So what is the rub to you?

L. BUSH: There isn't a rub to me. It's very preliminary. I mean, I would say, the only rub is that from the talk, from what you hear or what you read, you'd think that there is a cure for Alzheimer's, you know, just around the corner, but that's not the way.

(CROSSTALK)

KING: They are very hopeful about it.

L. BUSH: They're hopeful, but it is very, very preliminary. There is adult stem cell research, which is very promising, but there's no ban on stem cell research. People can...

KING: So you're not opposed to it morally.

L. BUSH: No, I'm not. I mean, you know, my dad died of Alzheimer's. KING: What's the rub?

G. BUSH: Well, here's the decision I made. As Laura said, there had been no federal dollars given to embryonic stem cell research. I decided that there were existing lines

which could provide promising potential discovery. As a matter of fact, there's 22 active lines now which has led to over a couple of hundred projects being explored off those lines.

When you say stem cell line, that stem cell line can yield different cells, groups that can be used by scientists. And there's hundreds of scientists now doing research based upon my decision.

What I did say was that because a stem cell is derived from the destruction of a human embryo, that there's an ethical dilemma as well. And I believe that the expenditure of taxpayers' dollar on future destruction of human embryos was something we ought to consider very carefully. As a matter of fact, I listened to a panel of ethicists and made the decision that the stem cell lines which existed was ample for federal research.

KING: Don't you think though that the good would outweigh the bad? There's good and bad in a lot of things.

G. BUSH: That's the big debate, Larry, and this country has got to be very careful on destroying life to save life. And it's a debate that needs to move forward in a very careful way. And I listen very carefully to ethicists who impressed me about being cautious and respecting human life, I guess, is the best way to put it. And that's one issue, embryonic stem cell.

The other issue is therapeutic human cloning which I am against. And I think that leads down a slippery slope for people kind of -- designer clones. And so it's a classic discussion between ethics and science.

KING: You don't see it as moral to you?

L. BUSH: No, I mean, I think the president's stand is right, that...

KING: Doesn't in vitro also involve cells?

L. BUSH: Sure. I mean...

(CROSSTALK)

L. BUSH: ... what these embryos are from.

KING: Right.

G. BUSH: These are embryos that represent life and the fundamental question, as a society, is: Does society continue to take life, destroy life?

And I made the decision that there was ample number of stem cells, 22 thus far, and we believe more, that can spawn a lot of research to determine whether or not the hopes of these scientists become real.

Now listen, nobody cares more about curing disease than Laura and me. I mean, that's one of our responsibilities. As a matter of fact, at the NIH I made sure that the NIH's budget was doubled, as I said, during the course of my campaign so that we could conduct more research.

As Laura said, there is more research for stem cells than just embryonic stem cells; there are adult stem cells. And a lot of people believe that is a very hopeful aspect of the stem cell research field.

And we've increased spending quite dramatically.

KING: Do you understand Mrs. Reagan's viewpoint?

L. BUSH: Sure.

G. BUSH: Absolutely.

L. BUSH: And we have the same...

G. BUSH: Her dad had Alzheimer's.

L. BUSH: ... viewpoint. We all want a cure.

KING: He died.

L. BUSH: Yes, he died of Alzheimer's.

G. BUSH: I think my position is very reasonable. And you know, you say, well, why is it framed the way it is? Because it's a political season. Things happen -- people say things in politics in order to try to create division I guess. And but to say that we have banned embryonic stem cell research is simply not the truth.

But to say that I do care about human life is the truth.

KING: So doesn't that cause a quandary in you, even to include the 22 cells?

G. BUSH: No, they had already been established prior to when I needed to make a decision.

KING: So we're looking at new ones?

G. BUSH: Yes. New ones, that's right. These had already existed. And it's more than 22 stem cell lines.

L. BUSH: But there's no ban on -- this only federal funding that we're talking about.

KING: Only federal, I understand that.

L. BUSH: There is private funding... KING: The private funding can go on.

L. BUSH: Sure.

G. BUSH: I do think it's important for us to promote a culture of life in America. I think it's very important. I think a society which promotes a culture of life is a compassionate society and a decent society.

And it makes it easy to -- easier if you have a culture of life to wrestle with these very difficult decisions. I mean, there's -- should there be suicide -- allow people assisted suicides? I mean, there's a lot of issues that are very important.

KING: Isn't that a dilemma...

G. BUSH: There are a lot of dilemmas...

(CROSSTALK)

L. BUSH: They're all dilemmas.

G. BUSH: That's the whole point. They're not easy issues, but if you believe that the job is to promote a culture of life in society, the issues become more clear.

KING: We'll be right back with President and Mrs. Bush. Don't go away.