

Clinton bars federal research on human cloning

Urges voluntary moratorium in private labs

By SONYA ROSS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Declaring the creation of life “a miracle that reaches beyond laboratory science,” President Clinton yesterday barred spending federal money on human cloning. He also urged a halt in private research until the ethical impact

is better understood.

Clinton acknowledged that the government is not now funding such research, and said, “I just wanted to make sure that we keep it that way.”

Citing the cloning of an adult sheep in Scotland, Clinton asked the National Bioethics Advisory Commission last week to review the ramifications cloning would have for humans and report back to him in 90 days.

But he said he decided to restrict use of federal funds after learning that researchers in Oregon had cloned two rhesus monkeys from embryos — the world’s first cloned primates and the closest step yet to humans.

“Human cloning would have to raise deep concerns, given our most cherished concepts of faith and humanity,” Clinton said. “Each human life is unique, born of a miracle that reaches beyond laboratory science. I believe we must respect this profound gift and resist the temptation to replicate ourselves.”

Current law prohibits spending federal money on human embryo experiments, but the prohibition expires Sept. 30. Sen. Christopher Bond, R-Mo., has urged Congress to make the ban permanent.

Those restrictions, however, did not explicitly address cloned embryos, nor did it apply to all federal agen-

cies, so Clinton moved to close that loophole.

“Science often moves faster than our ability to understand its implications,” Clinton said. “Any discovery that touches upon human creation is not simply a matter of scientific inquiry. It is a matter of morality and spirituality as well.”

Clinton also asked private researchers — who are not covered by his directive — to voluntarily hold off at least until the National Bioethics Advisory Commission can study the matter, a move with which biological and medical researchers agreed.

“It’s a wise idea to call a time-out. This has happened a bit sooner than

people expected,” said Carl Feldbaum, president of the Biotechnology Industry Organization, a group representing those involved in health care, agricultural and environmental research.

However, researchers also warned the president that making his ban permanent could thwart vital research on how genes are turned on and off inside human cells, a key factor in finding a cure for cancer or some birth defects.

“We mustn’t shut down other related forms of research that could unlock the secrets to diseases,” said Ronald Green, director of the Ethics Institute at Dartmouth College and a

member of a 1994 panel on human embryo research at the National Institutes of Health.

Clinton, too, noted the difference cloning could make in agriculture, medical treatments or “helping to unlock the greatest secrets of the genetic code.” But, he said, he did not want scientific progress to move so fast that new developments are not handled responsibly.

“How can we get the benefits of our deep desire to find any possible cure for any malady that’s out there, without raising the kind of ethical implications that, in effect, we’re in the business where people are trying to play God?”