Congress debates blocking federal support for embryonic genome editing, introducing religious oversight

The U.S. House of Representatives is wading into the debate over whether human embryos should be modified to introduce heritable changes. Its fiscal year 2016 spending bill for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) would prohibit the agency from spending money to evaluate research or clinical applications for such products.

In an unusual twist, the bill—introduced on June 17—would also direct the FDA to create a committee that includes religious experts to review a forthcoming report from the US Institute of Medicine (IOM). The IOM's analysis, which considers the ethics of creating embryos that have three genetic parents, was commissioned by the FDA.

Privately funded research on editing the human germline remains legal in the United States. But the pending House bill seeks to make it harder to test embryo editing in clinical trials. A provision in the legislation would prevent the FDA from using federal funds to evaluate or permit research that involves either viable embryos with heritable genetic modifications, or sperm or eggs that could be used to create such an embryo.

"This step seems dumb—or ill-advised," says Hank Greely, a bioethicist at Stanford University in California. It might also be premature because the FDA has not shown any indication that it would approve such research. And such a ban would not apply to the type of research that the Chinese scientists performed, because the embryos they used were not viable.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: U.S. Congress Moves to Block Human Embryo Editing