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## Will the Real Mitt Romney Please Stand Up?

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It's got to be hard to be a Republican candidate.

Think back for a second, to Dr. William Frist, former senator from Tennessee. He is a surgeon, a healer, a man of science. Yet, he supported the religious right in prolonging the agony of Terri Schiavo, the comatose woman whose brain had -- as all non-politicized medical opinion predicted -- liquefied. Based on watching a video, he said he detected signs of conscious response.

It must have been difficult to stain a lifetime of medical learning and -- one could argue -- the Hippocratic Oath to pander to Karl Rove's evangelical shock troops. But such seems to be the price you pay for Republican presidential ambitions. I always wanted the opportunity to ask Dr. Frist: is this the first time you conducted diagnosis by 30-second news clip?

It looks like Mitt Romney is making the same kind of Faustian compromises.

As governor of a decidedly blue state, he was *for* gay rights, choice, gun control and funding stem cell research. Now, he's against all of them. He said that he switched his position on stem cell research during a discussion with stem cell researchers. I'm not sure what epiphanies changed his mind on choice, gay rights and gun control. Maybe he got a package deal.

He is not the first Republican to kiss the ring of the NRA's Wayne LaPierre or to realize there are votes to be had in denying a woman's sovereignty over her own body and the homosexual campaign to take down America.

But as a researcher myself, I find the stem cell position especially interesting. Remember, this is a man who prior to 2005 did not just support embryonic stem cell research, he championed it.

In that respect, he was aligned with some 65 percent of Americans and virtually the entire research community.

Just for the record, nobody is seriously debating the potential of stem cells. They are the dawning of a new age of science; they represent uncharted possibility in the treatment of disease and injury. Scientists agree we need hundreds, possibly thousands, of new lines to advance learning that could save and improve many millions of lives. The single best way to create the lines is to harvest the unused embryos from in-vitro fertilization -- the non-viable embryos that are already targeted for destruction.

Putting aside the faith-based refusal to save lives, one can almost summon some respect - - compared at least to Romney's violent lurch to the right -- for a Sam Brownback no way-no how position on funding embryonic stem cell research. This is his belief, and he's sticking to it. If his position is calculated, at least the calculation is consistent.

Belief; that is the issue, isn't it?

There are those who *believe* that embryonic stem cell research equates to destroying life; even though we're talking about a technical procedure that happens in a Petri dish. There are those who believe that embryonic research puts us on the often-cited slippery slope to cloning; much the same way the former Senator Rick Santorum argued that gay marriage put us on the slippery slope to people marrying animals.

It's a matter of faith. It's a theoretical argument and impossible to prove one way or the other.

But all of those people who are going to suffer from diabetes or Alzheimer's or Parkinson's or paralysis, they aren't theoretical at all. They are very real. And one of the most important areas of research in the history of medicine can help them -- if we provide the tools.

As epiphanies go, Gov. Romney, consider this one: it's time to stop counting votes in the early southern state primaries, stop genuflecting before a narrow and well-organized voting block that wants to impose their personal beliefs on the hope of others to live healthy lives, or to live at all. Stand up for people who need you. Stand up for what you really believe.