



Bipartisan group of lawmakers proposes stem cell research bills

DEANNA BELLANDI
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CHICAGO - A bipartisan group of lawmakers on Thursday proposed doling out \$25 million a year for five years for stem cell research, something Gov. Rod Blagojevich already has used his executive powers to spend money on.

House Republican Leader Tom Cross wants to write that support into law with two new pieces of legislation: one that permits stem cell research - including human embryonic - and another that allows public funding for the work.

It's the latest attempt to get lawmakers to endorse stem cell research using human embryos. Such a measure previously has been narrowly endorsed by the House but failed in the Senate.

"This is an issue that has gone on without success for way too long," said Cross of Oswego. "My patience as a father with a daughter with diabetes and as a legislator has really worn thin."

Scientists say embryonic stem cell research could one day lead to cures for diseases such as diabetes and Alzheimer's. But opponents say it destroys an embryo, which many consider to be human life.

Cross' measure would allow human embryonic stem cell research and adult stem cell research. It would ban human cloning.

His proposed legislation initially would provide \$25 million for research in 2008 - money that would come from the millions of dollars the state collects in tobacco lawsuit settlements.

"It is our hope to do that \$25 million at a minimum for the next five years," Cross said.

Blagojevich has used his executive powers to so far spend \$15 million on stem cell research over the objections of state lawmakers who have opposed funding because of ideological differences.

During his recent re-election campaign, Blagojevich said he wanted to spend \$100 million more.

"I support Rep. Cross' legislation that formalizes our commitment to stem cell research," Blagojevich said in a written statement.

But Republican state Sen. Bill Brady questioned spending state money on embryonic stem cell research because he says the real benefits are in adult stem cell research.

"It puts taxpayer resources where they're not doing the most good," Brady said.

Both Cross and Democratic state Sen. Jeff Schoenberg, who will sponsor bills in the Senate, said they are optimistic they can get the measures passed next year.

"I'm not gonna sit here and tell you that this is gonna fly out of the House. This is gonna be close. ... It will pass," said Cross, adding that he thinks opposition to embryonic stem cell research is waning.

Schoenberg, who has been behind the issue before, was much more optimistic, saying they are "on the brink of a major breakthrough" at the state Capitol.

Stem cell research advocates joined Cross and Schoenberg in announcing the proposed legislation at a medical research center at Northwestern University, along with Democratic Rep. Sara Feigenholtz and Republican Reps. Beth Coulson and Caroline Krause.

"Every day that goes by without full support for stem cell research means the pace of research is slowed," said Gretchen Livingston, volunteer legislative chairwoman for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.