



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

JUL 14 2004

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

There continues to be sincere and reasoned discussion about the ethics of federally funding human embryonic stem cell research. As Americans, we cherish human life. But what happens when our respect for the sanctity of new life collides with our desire to find therapies and cures for debilitating diseases? This is the dilemma our society wrestles with when it comes to human embryonic stem cells. Fair and compassionate people can disagree on how to solve this dilemma, and respect must be given to those of all viewpoints.

I write today to underscore the ethical importance of President Bush's decision on human embryonic research, update you on the significant progress being made within that framework, and inform you of two new initiatives through our National Institutes of Health that will help accelerate research on stem cells.

In 2001, President Bush made the decision to open, for the first time, the laboratory doors to federal funding for human embryonic stem cell research. The President determined, however, that federal funds should not be used to encourage or support the destruction of living human embryos, a principle that has been part of federal law since 1996. Accordingly, the President announced that federal funds would be available for stem cell research derived from embryos that had already been destroyed. He placed no limits on private funding of embryonic stem cell research.

The President remains committed to this policy, and it is working. Under his Administration, federal funding for embryonic stem cell research has grown from zero in 2001 to \$24.8 million now, with no cap on future funding. Most of the established U.S. scientists in this field have received funding, and shipments of stem cell lines are going out to researchers in record numbers. There have been more than 400 shipments to date, more than 3,500 additional shipments are still available, and even more will be obtainable in the future. More lines are available in the U.S. than in any other country in the world. At the same time, state governments and the private sector are supporting research outside the federal guidelines. One study estimates that 1,000 scientists at more than 30 firms spent \$208 million experimenting on embryonic stem cells in 2002.

It also should be noted that a great deal of important stem cell work is being done without wrestling with the ethics of research on embryos. Last year, the National Institutes of Health

funded \$190 million in “adult” stem cell research on, for example, cells that come from a person’s bone marrow or placental tissue. This research continues to show great promise.

The bottom line is that the progress we are making on embryonic stem cells, within the federal policy, and on adult stem cells is meaningful. It cannot be ignored; rather it must be fostered.

Thus, we are now taking two new steps to further accelerate research in this field. The NIH will create a National Embryonic Stem Cell Bank that will provide a ready source of human embryonic stem cells to scientists, ensure consistent quality of the lines and provide other technical support that will make it easier for scientists to use federally approved stem cells.

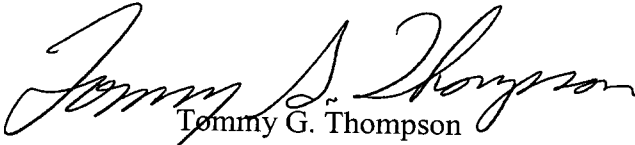
This stem cell bank will consolidate many of the cell lines eligible for funding in one location, reduce the costs researchers pay for the cells, ensure uniform quality control, and further our knowledge about the cells themselves.

Also, the NIH will create at least three new Centers of Excellence for Translational Stem Cell Research with the goal of exploiting new discoveries in basic embryonic and stem cell biology. These centers, which will be funded through \$18 million in grants over four years, will bring together stem cell experts, disease experts and other scientists to explore ways stem cells may be used to treat a wide range of illnesses, such as diabetes, heart disease and neurological disorders. The NIH hopes these centers will help accelerate transforming knowledge about the fundamental properties of these stem cells, both adult and embryonic, into useful therapies for diseases.

The President’s embryonic stem cell policy holds tremendous and yet-untapped potential, and we have much, much work to do within the policy as it exists. Before anyone can successfully argue that the stem cell policy should be broadened, we must first exhaust the potential of the stem cell lines made available within the policy, as well as the ability of the private sector to go beyond the policy.

Stem cell research holds great promise and hope. The President opened the door to federal funding for this research in a compassionate and ethical manner. And he continues to take aggressive steps to accelerate research in this field.

Sincerely,


Tommy G. Thompson