

January 11, 2007 - Slaughter Calls for Federal Investment in Stem Cell Research

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House Passes Bi-Partisan Stem Cell Bill 253 - 174

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today addressed the House of Representatives on the need for federal investment in embryonic stem cell research.

"Embryonic stem cell research is one of the most promising fields in modern medical research," said Rep. Slaughter. "Refusing to federally fund research toward the cures it could bring would be unconscionable. The American people support it, the Congress supports it, and it is the right thing to do."

"I believe people in wheelchairs will one day walk again," Rep. Slaughter said. "I believe that we can bring about an entirely new form of healthcare in America - one defined by shorter hospital stays, fewer invasive procedures, and increasing benefits to both our patients and our bottom line."

of federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. Citing the overwhelming body of scientific research already done in the field, she called upon her fellow Representatives to support the legislation, which passed in the House today by a vote of 253 to 174. The bill now moves to the Senate where it is also expected to pass.

Embryonic stem cell research is one of the top priorities of the new Democratic Congress, featured prominently in the "First 100 Hours" legislative agenda. Last year, President Bush used the first and only veto of his Presidency to strike down an identical stem cell bill that passed with broad bi-partisan support in both chambers of Congress. Now, with a majority in the House and Senate, Democrats have brought the issue into the forefront of public debate at a time when over seventy percent of the public supports embryonic stem cell research.

The complete text of Representative Slaughter's remarks, as prepared, are included below:

M. Speaker,

I rise today not just as a Member of Congress, but also as a microbiologist and a citizen who stands in awe of the life-saving potential we hold in our hands.

During recent years in Washington, politics has often stood in the way of the consensus and conclusions of the scientific community.

One of the victims of that reality has been funding for stem cell research. The opinions of those on both sides of this issue are both heart-felt and sincere. But I hope that today, we can put aside our differences and unite to achieve something that not just our scientists believe in, but that the American people both want and deserve.

New medical technologies have always been met with skepticism and concern. There was a time in America when organ donations were experimental, and blood transfusions were considered too dangerous to consider. And yet today, these procedures are saving lives every hour.

The same will soon be said of embryonic stem cells - if we want it.

We may hear from some today that adult stem cells, cord blood cells, and amniotic fluid cells are just as promising as embryonic stem cells. But while they all show promise and should be researched, none of them offer as much promise as embryonic stem cells.

An overwhelming body of international scientific research has shown embryonic stem cells to be the only type of stem cells capable of becoming any cell type in the body. They are the key to so many of the cures we have long sought after.

Let me provide just one example of how powerful this research could be.

There is growing evidence linking embryonic cell mutations to cancer. At UC San Francisco, scientists have discovered elevated activity of several embryonic stem cell genes in both testicular and breast cancers.

Based on this new finding, scientists are hypothesizing that mis-regulated embryonic stem cell genes could cause or at least advance cancer.

In fact, recent research is showing that up to 20% of all breast tumors are now suspected to originate in stem cells.

Scientists hope to learn more about the functions of genes in the cells that make up tumors. Their examinations could show why stem cells become cancerous and how doctors can treat them.

These breakthroughs could one day eradicate many forms of cancer at their source.

Because of its potential, fully 70 percent of Americans support embryonic stem cell research. And that's not surprising. Nearly everyone has suffered from a disease, or knows someone who has, that embryonic stem cell research could one day cure. Who wouldn't want to end the suffering of their son, sister, father or friend? Why would we choose to deny this hope to millions of Americans?

Nations throughout the world have embraced embryonic stem cell research. Their scientists are taking great strides forward. In the end, enforcing restrictive federal research policies will only ensure that the United States will continue to lose many of our best and brightest scientists in this field to other countries.

M. Speaker, many of history's greatest medical killers now have cures because of scientific research. Tens of millions of lives have been saved as a result. Today, we have the potential to save millions more, and to leave other deadly diseases behind us.

I believe people in wheelchairs will one day walk again. I believe that we can bring about an entirely new form of healthcare in America - one defined by shorter hospital stays, fewer invasive procedures, and increasing benefits to both our patients and our bottom line.

The bill before us today presents an ethical solution to research that could potentially benefit almost every American. It gives our country hope - hope that one day we won't have to watch our mothers die of breast cancer, our grandparents suffer from Alzheimer's, and our own children endure Type I diabetes.

If we fail to fund embryonic stem cell research, I do not believe that we will be able to look our children and grandchildren, our mothers or fathers, or our grandparents in the eye and tell them we did everything we could to help them live a better, healthier, longer, happier life.

I urge my colleagues who have second thoughts about this bill to step back and think of a loved one who could possibly benefit from this research. Your vote today should be clear.

FURTHER BACKGROUND:

- Last year, President Bush vetoed H.R. 810, a bipartisan bill that would have allowed federal funding of embryonic stem cell research. The bill passed the House by a 238-194 vote and the Senate by a 63-37 vote.

- Over 100 million Americans suffer from cancer, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, diabetes, spinal cord injuries and other debilitating diseases and disorders for which embryonic stem cell research holds great promise in finding new and better treatments and cures.

- Expanding stem cell research has strong bipartisan support in Congress, and is supported by over 72 percent of Americans. [Opinion Research Corporation]

- The DeGette-Castle bill increases the number of embryonic stem cell lines eligible to be used for federally-funded research. The bill authorizes HHS to support research involving embryonic stem cells meeting certain criteria, regardless of the date on which the stem cells were derived from an embryo.

- The bill lays out strict ethical guidelines, which allow federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. In order to acquire funding the following must be met:

- Embryos used to develop stem cells must be originally created for fertility treatment and are in excess of treatment needs;

- An embryo may only be used for stem cell research if the donors give their written consent.

- The individuals seeking fertility treatments must have "donated the embryos with written informed consent and without receiving any financial or other inducements to make the donation."

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