

U.S. Senate to Take Up Castle Stem Cell Bill -- April 9, 2007

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The U.S. Senate will begin consideration of a slightly revised version of the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, authored by Rep. Mike Castle, tomorrow, Tuesday, April 10 and has scheduled 20 hours of debate on this measure and another measure. Final votes are expected to occur either late Wednesday night or on Thursday. Each bill needs 60 votes to pass and no amendments will be allowed. The House of Representatives passed Castle's stem cell bill on January 11 by a vote of 253 to 174.

"I am pleased the U.S. Senate has turned its attention to the critically important issue of medical research. There is no question that embryonic stem cell research could be the greatest medical hope of the 21st century and we must ethically expand the current policy to allow our scientists and patients join in the race for the cures," Castle said.

"I am hopeful that this slightly revised version of the legislation, which now includes research into alternative forms of derivation, will serve as a carrot to the White House and that the President will remove his objections and sign this potentially life-saving legislation into law. Upon Senate passage of this legislation, I urge the House of Representatives to quickly consider this bill and send it to the President's desk."

The base bill, the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct and support research that utilizes human embryonic stem cells if the following ethical requirements are met (regardless of the date on which the stem cells were derived from a human embryo):

(1) The stem cells were derived from human embryos that have been donated from in vitro fertilization clinics, were created for the purposes of fertility treatment, and were in excess of the clinical need of the individuals seeking such treatment.

(2) Prior to the consideration of embryo donation and through consultation with the individuals seeking fertility treatment, it was determined that the embryos would never be implanted in a woman and would otherwise be discarded.

(3) The individuals seeking fertility treatment donated the embryos with written informed consent and without receiving any financial or other inducements to make the donation.

Additionally, the bill will require the Secretary to conduct and support basic and applied research to develop techniques for the isolation, derivation, production, or testing of stem cells that, like embryonic stem cells, are capable of producing all or almost all of the cell types of the developing body and may result in improved understanding of or treatments for diseases and other adverse health conditions, but are not derived from a human embryo.

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