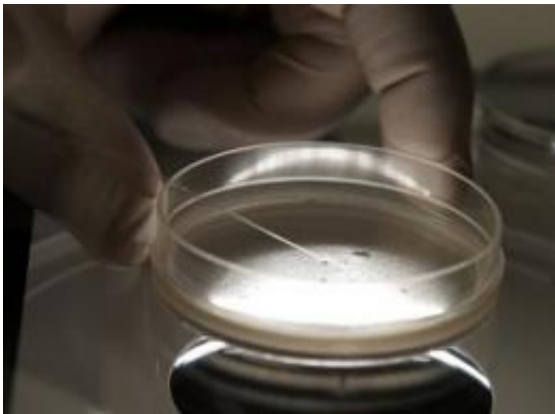


## Some states push back against stem cell research

March 11 2009, By SHANNON McCAFFREY , Associated Press Writer

---



In this Oct. 22, 2008 file photo, Theresa Gratsch, a Ph.D. research specialist, expands human embryonic stem cells under a microscope at the University of Michigan Center for Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research Laboratory in Ann Arbor, Mich. The University of Michigan announced Monday, March 9, 2009 it was launching the state's first major embryonic stem cell research program since voters eased restrictions on such work in November of 2008. The university unveiled plans the same day President Barack Obama signed an executive order that ends former President George W. Bush's limits on using federal dollars for stem cell research. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya, File)

(AP) -- A showdown is shaping up in some of the nation's most conservative states over embryonic stem cell research, as opponents draw language and tactics from the battle over abortion to counter President Barack Obama's plan to ease research restrictions.

Legislation granting [fertilized embryos](#) "personhood" has gained momentum in at least three state legislatures. The strategy - which has been used to try to undermine the Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion - is now aimed at embryonic [stem cell research](#). The scientific field uses [stem cells](#) from [human embryos](#), which can develop into different kinds of adult cells, to seek answers about human health.

Opposition to both abortion and stem cell research hinges on the same issue: When does life begin? As a result, embryonic stem cell research has become the latest front in the decades-old battle over abortion.

"If you are someone who believes that a single cell embryo is a person then you are looking for any opportunity you can to make that argument. But as a country, legally, we've never accepted that," said Michael Werner of the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research. "The legislative tactics are the same."

Abortion opponents believe embryonic stem cell research is an assault on life in its earliest form. Fertilized embryos are destroyed when stem cells are extracted from them for research.

"No one's right for a cure supersedes someone else's right to life," said Dan Becker, president of Georgia Right to Life.

The opponents expect to push for restrictions in conservative-leaning states. And they say states must take the lead in pushing the abortion and stem cell issues into the increasingly conservative federal courts.

Legal experts said the state measures restricting stem cell research raise [constitutional concerns](#) in a largely untested area of law.

Alta Charo, professor of law and bioethics at the University of Wisconsin, said a new line of legal thought holds that scientific inquiry

should be protected by the First Amendment, "like a political or religious statement or activity."

She said the measures restricting the use of fertilized embryos also raise questions about the right to procreation.

"The courts haven't settled this yet," Charo said.

While Louisiana already bans the destruction of fertilized embryos, the courts have not yet weighed in, Charo said.

In Georgia, a measure that would ban some forms of stem cell research on fertilized embryos is moving quickly through the state Senate. The bill would outlaw the destruction of fertilized embryos, which the legislation defines as a person. It is expected to face a vote in the full state Senate on Thursday.

Similar "personhood" measures have cleared one chamber each in Montana and North Dakota.

They come in the wake of a Colorado ballot initiative that said human life begins at conception. It failed to win voter approval last year.

David Prentice, senior fellow for life sciences at the Washington, D.C.-based Family Research Council, said Obama's announcement Monday that he will free federal funds for embryonic stem cell research will rally conservatives.

"This is the beginning," Prentice said. "I think there will be more to come."

In 2001, President George W. Bush limited federal funding for embryonic stem cell research to 21 stem cell lines already in existence.

Because they were already being used for research, Bush allowed work on them to continue.

Obama's new approach will enable federally funded researchers to use hundreds of new embryonic stem cell lines. Supporters believe the research could lead to treatments for major disorders, such as Parkinson's disease and spinal injuries.

Eight states bucked the Bush administration limits and allowed state money to be spent on the research: California, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York.

Some of them, struggling with gaping budget deficits, may rein in state funding for those research programs, now that federal dollars will again be flowing.

Sean Tipton, director of public affairs at the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, said legislation that would affect stem cell research has been introduced in several states, including Alabama, Georgia, Maryland, Montana, North Dakota and South Carolina.

"It's clearly part of a national strategy and at some point it will probably succeed," Tipton said.

Tipton said advocacy groups are targeting states where they have the best chance of success.

One of those is Georgia, where Gov. Sonny Perdue has said he opposes embryonic stem cell research, even as he tries to lure biotech companies to state.

"I am absolutely opposed to creating embryos to cure a disease," Perdue told reporters this week.

The Georgia bill cleared the Senate Health and Human Services Committee by a close 7-6. The religious conservatives pushing it are influential with Georgia's Republican-led Legislature.

Opponents say the Senate bill would be a blow to the state's thriving research universities, as well as fertility clinics that perform thousands of in-vitro treatments every year.

"We have the president of the United States saying he is going to put science ahead of politics and unfortunately in Georgia we are moving in the opposite directions," said state Sen. David Adelman, a Democrat from Decatur.

---

National Conference of State Legislatures Genetic Technologies Project:  
<http://www.ncsl.org/programs/health/genetics>

*©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.*

Citation: Some states push back against stem cell research (2009, March 11) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-03-states-stem-cell.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--