

## Senator pushes bill legalizing stem cell research

September 13 2010, By JIM ABRAMS , Associated Press Writer

---

(AP) -- Sen. Arlen Specter on Monday initiated a drive to legalize federal funding of embryonic stem cell research, superseding conflicting court decisions that he said are slowing critical work to find cures for crippling diseases.

The Pennsylvania Democrat, speaking on the Senate floor as senators returned from a monthlong recess, said his legislation would codify an executive order issued by President Barack Obama last year advancing [stem cell research](#)

Even a temporary suspension of federal funding while the courts debate current funding practices disrupts research projects in such areas as heart disease, sickle [cell anemia](#), liver failure, muscular dystrophy and other maladies, Specter said.

In the House, Reps. Diana DeGette, D-Colo., and Mike Castle, R-Del., have introduced similar legislation. It's unclear whether lawmakers will have the time, or the political will, to undertake the controversial subject in the few weeks remaining before Congress breaks for the fall election campaign.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, who has his own legislation promoting embryonic stem cell research, is holding a hearing on the subject Thursday before the Appropriations subcommittee on health he heads.

In March last year Obama issued an executive order easing restrictions

on federal research on human embryonic research. But last month U.S. District Court Judge Royce Lamberth issued a preliminary injunction in which he stated that the research violated a 1996 law banning the use of taxpayer money to derive stem cells from embryos.

With that decision, the National Institutes of Health halted funding, only to resume some projects after an appeals court last week issued a temporary stay of Lamberth's injunction while the Obama administration appeals the ruling.

"There is great uncertainty in the research community as to what will happen," Specter said, explaining the need to pass a law confirming the research.

He said the NIH has spent \$546 million on embryonic stem cell research "and phenomenal progress has already been made."

[Embryonic stem cells](#) can be turned into any tissue of the body, raising hopes that they can one day be used to cure spinal cord injuries, Parkinson's disease and other ailments. The cells are derived from excess embryos created during in vitro fertilization therapies that would eventually be discarded.

Opponents say the research is another form of abortion because human embryos must be killed to obtain the stem cells.

The 1996 law prohibits the use of taxpayer money in work that harms an embryo, so government policy has been to work with batches of cells culled using private money.

President George W. Bush in 2001 allowed limited federal funding of human [embryonic stem cell research](#), but then in 2006 he vetoed legislation that would have codified rules for that research.

Specter's bill specifies that the [stem cells](#) must come from embryos donated from in vitro fertilization clinics that are in excess of clinical need and would otherwise be discarded. The individuals donating the embryos must give their written consent to their use in research and cannot receive any payment.

©2010 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Senator pushes bill legalizing stem cell research (2010, September 13) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-09-senator-bill-legalizing-stem-cell.html>

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.