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Doyle will give keynote speech at stem cell summit

He'll address state's role in research

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Gov. Jim Doyle will take his support for embryonic stem cell research to a national stage Saturday as the keynote speaker at a stem cell summit at Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif.

Advertisement Doyle will speak to scientists, policy-makers and patient advocates at a two-day conference sponsored by the Stanford Center for Biomedical Ethics and the Genetic Policy Institute. The conference is called "Stem Cell Policy and Advocacy Summit: Empowering the Pro-Cures Coalition."

"He's considered a hero to our movement," said Bernard Siegel, executive director of the institute, a non-profit group based in Wellington, Fla., that works to encourage stem cell research.

"He's a governor in an important state relating to stem cell research, and he's actually done something proactive and was unafraid to use a veto pen in a day when a lot of political leaders sort of hold their fingers to the wind."

Virtually all organs, cells and other body tissues arise from such embryonic stem cells, which first were isolated in 1998 by University of Wisconsin-Madison scientist James Thomson.

Last year, Doyle vetoed an anti-cloning bill that some said would have had a chilling effect on stem cell research. He also has directed the state commerce department to spend at least \$5 million to attract stem cell companies to the state and supported the \$150 million Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery, a planned public / private center for inter-disciplinary research and commercialization of discoveries in embryonic stem cells and other areas of science and technology.

Embryonic stem cells have yielded no therapies so far, but many think they have the potential to cure conditions ranging from spinal cord injuries to Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease.

Opponents of human embryonic stem cell research say scientists who use 4- or 5-day-old fertilized eggs to derive embryonic stem cells destroy human life.

Doyle said he would speak to summit attendees about how important it is to build political coalitions to support embryonic stem cell research, his experiences "fighting off an aggressive attempt" to curtail the research in the state, and Wisconsin's leading role in stem cell science.

"I'd like to tell you this is some great courageous act on my part, but I'm governor of the state where this all started. How would I ever say to the parent of a child with diabetes that this state is going to turn its back on them?" Doyle said.

Representatives of many of the groups that fund stem cell research will be among the expected 150 to 200 attendees, Siegel said. The summit's focus will be to share strategies for advancing embryonic stem cell research, which has been held back

by federal policies that limit scientific inquiry in the area, he said.

"We are creating a movement, the pro-cures movement, that has stakeholders from the entire community who want this research to advance," Siegel said.

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