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Stem cell rally Oct. 29

Published Saturday, October 14, 2006
by [John Johnston](#)

Burt Aaronson is hopeful, but also realistic about whether the Florida House of Representatives will vote to place a constitutional amendment on the 2008 ballot, authorizing millions in state support for stem cell research.

"Through (State Senator) Ron Klein, we got it through the Senate last year," Aaronson said, "but the house turned it down."

Some 60 percent of the both the House and Senate must approve any proposed amendment before it can be placed on a ballot. Beyond that, some 611,000 signatures must be gathered.

Aaronson said his group, the Florida Coalition for Embryonic Stem Cell Research (CESCR) "will continue working on a petition to get enough signatures" despite a lack of House support. That support perhaps will come, he believes, if enough signatures can be gathered.

A CESCR sponsored rally to support embryonic stem cell research will be held Sunday, Oct. 29, 1 pm, at Florida Atlantic University in the Carole & Barry Kaye Performing Arts Auditorium, Boca Raton.

Free to the public, the rally is intended "to promote public awareness and offer educational information on the critical issue of stem cell research," Aaronson said.

Whether its through his influence in getting the matter legislatively proposed, or if it happens owing to a constitutional amendment, the 77-year old Aaronson in fact wants his political legacy to be known as the father of publicly financed embryonic stem cell research in the State of Florida

"This is what I want to be remembered for, more than anything else," Aaronson has told The Boca Raton News.

Local Opposition

Aaronson is opposed locally by Susan Cutaia, a Boca Raton media personality and Eucharistic minister, who wants to define the role, if any, of public money for controversial stem cell research.

Aaronson, and whose District 5 includes a portion of Boca Raton, has been pushing for more than year to promote a state constitutional amendment for \$200 million in state funding to fund embryonic stem cell research.

Cutaia wants to stop him by seeking a counter constitutional amendment -- but this one preventing the use of state funding for embryonic stem cell research.

Both of those petition campaigns were moving forward late last year when State Sen. Ron Klein stepped in.

"This should be a matter of law, not the constitution," Klein told The Boca Raton News.

"We believe it is good government to enact a law funding this research, rather than having to amend the Florida Constitution to do so," Aaronson said. "We support the Florida Legislature taking this up and we encourage that this legislation be passed."

It wasn't passed, and both Aaronson and Cutaia vowed to shift the focus back to the



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\$400,000	\$1,011.42
\$600,000	\$1,517.14
\$700,000	\$1,769.99
\$800,000	\$2,022.85
\$900,000	\$2,275.70
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proposed pro and con constitutional amendments on the 2008 ballot.

In summary, Aaronson's amendment follows:

The Department of Health would receive \$20 million per year, for 10 consecutive years. Those monies in turn would be used for embryonic stem cell research "using, or using the derivatives of, human embryos that, before or after formation, have been donated to medicine under donor instructions forbidding intrauterine embryo transfer." Aaronson's amendment would also forbid use of the money except by non-profit research institutions. Recipients would be chosen "by scientific merit as reckoned in a peer review process by disinterested experts in the relevant fields."

"Educational"

On the other hand, Cutaia's position is that her effort is "an educational process."

She then drew the distinction she believes is critical in that educational process - that adult stem cell research should be pursued, virtually eliminating the "ethical and moral issues of embryonic research."

Cutaia leads a group called Citizens for Science and Ethics, Inc. "CSE is seeking to establish an ethical framework for state-funded research here in Florida," she said, adding that the question is not about stem cell research as such, nor about religion.."

"We not against stem cell research," she said. "We're against killing the donor."

Adult stem cell research is "where the money should be spent," she said, "while embryonic research is being sold to people in sound bites."

And for those who want to make the question a religious debate, "it's not," she said. "This is an ethical and moral issue, not religious, and there are plenty of people who have problems with embryonic stem cell research who would object to being called religious."

She said the amendment CSE seeks does not preclude private or federal funding for any form of research. She says CSE is concerned about a different matter, and that is "forcing Florida's taxpayers to pay for something that many find ethically problematic."

The substance of Cutaia's amendment: "No revenue of the state shall be spent on experimentation that involves the destruction of a live human embryo."

Aaronson counters: "As far as the ethics of this are concerned, was it ethical to go to Iraq on false pretenses? Is it ethical to go over there and kill people so that, theoretically, we're saving people here? Tell me - what's the difference?" he said, adding:

"And is it ethical not to try to restore human dignity," through the use of this research "to make people walk again?"

Aaronson says flatly: "An embryo is not a life - and I'm interested in saving lives."

At The Rally

One of the keynote speakers Oct. 29 will be Eve Herold who has recently authored "Stem Cell Wars: Inside Stories from the Frontlines", endorsed by Ron Reagan, Jr., Senator Diane Feinstein and June Walker. Also to speak will be CESC Director Bernie Siegel.

Attendees will hear from experts in the field exactly what research is being done today and where this research is headed in the future. Among the presenters will be a research scientist from the Diabetes Research Institute.

"We encourage the community to attend this ground-breaking event to learn about the hope that this scientific and biological research may offer to those with life threatening and disabling diseases," Aaronson said.

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