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## Fox says stem cell research a key issue

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Actor Michael J. Fox spoke at the Sun Dome on Tuesday about his support of stem cell research and the Kerry-Edwards ticket.

Actor Michael J. Fox, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 1991, won three Emmy awards for Spin City when he retired to pursue the cause for stem cell research fulltime. He founded the Michael J. Fox Foundation and

travels the United States advocating the funding and implementation of this controversial issue.

Fox spoke Tuesday to an audience at the USF Sun Dome about the importance of stem cell research. The Democratic National Committee sponsored the lecture.

Fox was joined by a group of panelists that included Faye Armitage, founder of Cure Paralysis Now and mother of Jason, a quadriplegic, and Dr. Juan Sanchez-Ramos, a neurologist and neuroscientist. The speech was intended to earn support for stem cell research and the Kerry-Edwards campaign, which promises to fund the research. President George W. Bush has opposed funding since 2001, when he spoke publicly against the research.

The presentation took place in front of an audience of approximately 300 people. Amongst the backdrop of a blue-and-yellow banner reading "Hope For Our Families," Fox and the featured guests delivered insights into the world of stem cell research and answered a variety of questions from students.

"We are all affected by this -- our loved ones and the hundreds of thousands of people afflicted with diseases that can be helped by stem cell research," Fox said.

Jason Armitage and his mother Faye have traveled the world looking for treatment to help Jason regain movement after a soccer clash resulted in paralysis from the neck down. Faye said all attempts to find a cure failed -- then she found out about stem cell research.

Stem cell research involves the taking of embryonic stem cells from in vitro fertilization clinics for use on people who are affected by a number of diseases that may benefit from the regenerative properties of stem cells. An example Dr. Sanchez-Ramos used involved a real experiment done with a salamander, which grew back its arm in 28 days after it was cut off. The moral implications of this procedure, however, cause opponents to link it to abortion and the elimination of respect for human life. However, Fox disagrees.

"When we talk about stem cell research, all kind of images come up that just don't factor," Fox said. "I respect people's opinion, but I recognize that we can do this ethically."

Fox alluded to the fact that young scientists resist entering this field of science for fear of lack of funding.

"Progress is not about money, it's about people," Fox said.

This research can help thousands of people just like Jason, who are incapable of growing back crucial tissue that allow them to move again.

"Any parent wants independence for their child so they can move on, but Jason can't," said Mrs. Armitage. During his mother's speech, Jason put his head down and cried.

The DNC's president for the state of Florida, Scott Mattison, asked people to believe in science and compassion and vote for Kerry this election. Compassion, Mattison said, is something that Bush lacks.

"How can you be compassionate if you're willing to turn your back on science?" Mattison said.

For all opponents of stem cell research, Faye asks if it's better to throw away these cells or save lives?

She pointed out that 58 senators have sent Bush letters trying to obtain approval for more funding that he has refused. She said she feels the only way to change that is to vote for the Kerry-Edwards ticket on Nov. 2.

Students at the presentation were eager to see Fox and to learn more about stem cell research.

"I think it's going to be inspiring and we must take advantage of him being here," said freshman Sabine Franklin.

Joe Murphy said he thinks it's OK for Fox to speak up about this despite his partisanship because it is something he feels strongly about.

"We are very excited; this is the first thing (Michael J. Fox) has done for the Kerry-Edwards campaign," said Tara Klimek, a coordinator for the Democratic National Committee.

Afterwards, students stayed for autographs and to take pictures with the famous actor. Fox said he hopes his presence at USF will impact young people to make a change in the upcoming election and he said he thinks it's important to raise awareness of other issues in this year's presidential race.

The Student Society for Stem Cell Research, the on-campus organization promoting the cause, was at the lecture to recruit students interested in becoming advocates of the research. ■

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