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New group files for amendment against stem-cell study

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Saturday, September 24, 2005

BOCA RATON — The statewide battle over stem-cell research just got a lot more interesting with the entry of a new player.

Susan Cutaia, a Boca Raton mortgage broker and eucharistic minister, announced Friday the filing of a constitutional amendment that would prevent state financing of experiments requiring the destruction of human embryos.

Stem-cell therapy

[A Boca family](#) travels to Mexico for stem-cell therapy they hope will heal heal quadriplegic Adam Susser, 4.

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"This is such a divisive issue. There are so many taxpayers who will not be happy having tax money going to something they are not comfortable with," said Cutaia, chairperson of the nascent Citizens for Science and Ethics Inc.

The timing of Cutaia's announcement coincides with this week's announcement by Floridians for Stem Cell Research and Cures that it will ask Florida voters to approve a constitutional amendment seeking \$200 million in taxpayer money over 10 years to pay for stem-cell research.

"Their timing is interesting," said Bernard Siegel, vice chairman of that organization. "Essentially it raises the stakes: Floridians are going to be faced with a stark contrast on their ballot."

Both groups face the daunting task of having to gather 611,009 signatures by Dec. 31 to get their proposed amendments on the ballot, not to mention the millions of dollars that must be raised to get the language on the ballot and to fend off opposition. Their amendments also must pass Florida Supreme Court muster.

Palm Beach County Commissioner Burt Aaronson, who launched Floridians for Stem Cell Research and Cures in July, said he has hundreds of volunteers on the job.

Cutaia says she will use her interfaith and business connections, as well as her local radio talk show, to shore up support. She hosts a live call-in radio show *Talk About Mortgages*.

The language is simple, straightforward and well under the 75-word limit, said Cutaia. It reads: "No revenue of the state shall be spent on experimentation that involves the destruction of a live human embryo." It was drafted by lawyers at Ausley & McMullen in Tallahassee.

She claims to have the support of several prominent scientists including Claire Thuning-Roberson, former chair of BioFlorida, and Eric Laywell, an assistant professor in the department of neuroscience at the University of Florida. Efforts to reach them were unsuccessful.

Those who oppose the use of embryonic stem cell research typically cite moral and religious reasons. Those who favor it say it has the potential to save lives and provide cures for numerous diseases.

"People are saying the means are justified because of the cure. We are taking a human life and saying you are expendable," said Cutaia, who also is a member of the Council of Catholic Women.

Countered Aaronson: "I am not going to comment on the ethics part of it. The people who will be against us, will be against us. Let's see which one passes and which one fails."




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