

A Critical Reading Of This Article Finds:

¹ Embryonic stem cell research isn't forbidden or outlawed in Michigan. Killing and cloning human embryos is. Researchers in Michigan are allowed to import embryonic stem cells and do research on them in Michigan. Sean Morrison, the scientist Lessenberry discusses, is listed on the University of Michigan's Michigan Center for hES (human embryonic stem) Cell Research web page as working on the "Isolation and characterization of Neural Crest Stem Cells from Human ES Cells." The front page of the Center's web site notes it was established in 2002 and received a federal grant in 2003. It also mentions that "(m)ore than 40 scientists are active participants in the Center for hES Cell Research." After Jack Lessenberry published a previous editorial making similar false claims about embryonic stem cell research being banned in Michigan, he was provided with the above information showing quite clearly that embryonic stem cell research is neither "forbidden" or "outlawed" in Michigan.

² President Bush allowed federal funding on embryonic stem cell lines created before August of 2001. To claim this decision was "seen as ridiculous by all but the religious right" is a dubious assertion. Right after the decision was announced, Dr. John McDonald, director of the Spinal Cord Injury Unit at Washington University School of Medicine, called the decision a "good first step." Senator Ted Kennedy didn't completely agree with the decision but told the Association Press it was "an important step forward." Senator Orrin Hatch, whom Lessenberry cites, called the decision "a thoughtful, decent, honorable decision." Because of President Bush's decision, tax dollars for the first time were used to fund embryonic stem cell research within limits. To date, more than \$130 million in federal tax funding has been allocated for embryonic stem cell research. It should also be noted that President Bush's decision had no impact on private funding of embryonic stem cell research.

AND THERE'S MORE (see next page)



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Op-Ed: Embryonic stem-cell ban shows state isn't serious

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ANN ARBOR -- Sean Morrison, the 39-year-old director of the University of Michigan's Center for Stem Cell Biology, is a rarity among scientists. Personable, well-spoken and easygoing, he seems as much at ease with the media as he is in the laboratory.

But he must be one of the most frustrated men in the state. By all accounts a brilliant young geneticist, he has the resources of one of the nation's major universities and a background in what is the cutting-edge frontier of biology: stem-cell research.

Yet he has the misfortune to be working in a state with some of the most repressive and restrictive laws¹forbidding embryonic stem cell research. Early on, President Bush's administration denied government funding to anyone conducting embryonic stem cell research on any new material other than some in use in 2001.

²That was seen as ridiculous by all but the religious right. California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a fellow Republican, campaigned for a state initiative³that successfully raised \$10 billion for embryonic stem cell research. Two prominent pro-life U.S. Senators, Orrin Hatch of Utah and former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, called embryonic stem cell research "the pro-life position."

But in Michigan, embryonic stem cell research is itself outlawed, thanks to the iron grip that Right to Life of Michigan has over much of the Legislature. The only other states with a total ban on such research are Louisiana, Arkansas and North and South Dakota.

With the possible exception of Louisiana, none of those states has the facilities to do cutting-edge research anyway. Michigan does. Morrison, a native of Canada, knows that in Toronto,⁴work with embryonic stem cells has reversed macular degeneration in rats.

He knows that there is tremendous potential, economic as well as scientific, in stem-cell research.

⁵Yet for now, that is impossible. State Rep.⁶Paul Condino, D-Southfield, has a package of bills now before the House Judiciary Committee that would repeal the bans on stem cell research.⁷Polls show a solid majority of Michiganders are in favor of this type of research. But thanks to the lobbying and fundraising efforts of Right to Life of Michigan, those bills' chances are seen as dim in the House, and nonexistent in the GOP-controlled Senate.

Then last month, a stunning new development seemed likely to turn the entire world of stem-cell biology upside down.

Separate teams of scientists in Wisconsin and Japan reported they had successfully genetically reprogrammed human skin cells to take on all the prop-

3 The state initiative passed in California will spend \$3 billion dollars over 10 years on embryonic stem cell and human cloning research. This will cost California taxpayers approximately \$6 billion dollars.

4 While embryonic stem cells may have helped the vision of rats, adult stem cells are currently being used to treat various vision problems encountered by human beings. Researchers in Australia restored a man's vision by using a limbal stem cell transplant. In Japan, researchers have been treating diseases of the cornea with stem cells from the mouths of patients.

5 Michigan researchers have been working with embryonic stem cells for more than 5 years! Creating treatments with embryonic stem cells isn't "impossible" because of Michigan's laws, it's highly unlikely because embryonic stem cells need to overcome some large scientific problems (tumor formation and immune system rejection) before they can ever be used in humans.

6 Rep. Paul Condino isn't the main sponsor of those bills. Rep. Andy Meisner and Rep. Mark Meadows are. Rep. Condino isn't even listed as a co-sponsor. They would allow human embryos to be killed for research in Michigan. They would also allow for the killing of cloned human embryos created by the cloning technique somatic cell nuclear transfer. Another bill introduced in the Michigan Senate by Gretchen Whitmer would legalize the cloning of human embryos in Michigan.

7 Which poll is Lessenberry referring to? One poll taken in February of 2007 showed that 65% of Michigan residents "would allow scientists to conduct research on stem cells and establish strict reporting and oversight on any stem cell research in their state." The word "embryonic" was **nowhere** to be found. Another poll conducted by Public Opinion Strategies in April of 2007 found that 70% of likely voters in Michigan opposed "stem cell research that kills the human embryo so the stem cells can be removed."

erties of embryonic stem cells. Right-to-lifers hailed this discovery as ending the debate once-and-for all.

Others, more skeptical, wondered if this was another case of "cold fusion in a jar," the 1989 alleged energy breakthrough that left a lot of scientists and journalists looking sheepish afterwards.

In an interview, Morrison said more study is clearly needed. "I hope this does work out. Potentially, these cells would be easier to work with than embryonic stem cells. But there is a lot of research to do with both methods."

Morrison spends more time than he would like refuting lies and misconceptions.⁸ Over and over he explains patiently that embryonic stem-cell research doesn't use aborted fetuses.

What it uses, where it is legal, are discarded, tiny clumps of cells from fertility clinics, groups of 50 to 150 cells called blastocysts.

⁹ The cells Morrison wants to use ¹⁰ wouldn't otherwise become a baby. Fertility clinics make far more embryos than they can use.

¹¹ Eventually, they are thrown out. "So in Michigan, it's legal to dispose of these embryos, throw them away, but not to use them to do research," to find cures for diseases, he said.

As it stands now, he said, Michigan is sending "a message to the world" that ¹² the state isn't serious about the life sciences.

For a state leading the nation in unemployment and desperately in need of new jobs and industries, that's not a good thing.

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8 If people mistakenly believe embryonic stem cells come from aborted children, it might be because there was a lot of hype from scientists in the 1990's about how fetal cells from aborted children were going to be used to treat various diseases. That hype, similar to the hype over embryonic stem cells, hasn't panned out. The information Right to Life of Michigan provides through web sites and other educational material doesn't promote the inaccurate idea that embryonic stem cells come from aborted children.

9 Sean Morrison is already allowed to use embryonic stem cells and he currently is. He wants Michigan law to be changed so he can kill human embryos for research.

10 Blastocyst is a scientific term used to describe embryos at a certain stage of development. Human embryos at this stage of development are certainly capable of developing into fetuses, newborns, toddlers and all the other stages of human development.

Everyone was at one point in their lives a blastocyst.

¹¹ Human embryos don't need to be thrown out. Many human embryos created by in-vitro fertilization are stored by their parents in the hopes of initiating another pregnancy while others are donated to couples looking to adopt and bring these children to birth.

¹² Michigan doesn't need to be a place where cloning and killing human embryos are legal to be serious about life sciences. The web page of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation says that "(w)ith over \$2 billion invested in R&D each year and nearly 120 new companies since 2000, Michigan leads the nation as one of the fastest growing life sciences states" and "(g)rowth of Michigan's life sciences industry has exceeded growth of the U.S average, growing 27% in employment, 32% in number of companies and 165% in sales."