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### **State loses while stem cell research is limited**

States that allow it are outpacing Michigan

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Kathleen Russell has a vested interest in removing barriers to stem cell research. The Ann Arbor resident suffers from Parkinson's, one of many diseases that scientists believe could be better treated or even cured by such research.

Russell told The News that her family, although politically at odds on other issues, agrees that stem cell research must be expanded.

Michigan legislators should take a lesson from that - bi-partisan support of science with such potential is long overdue.

Research using adult stem cells is less debated, and in fact Michigan is strong in this area. But the state has strict prohibitions on research that would harm an embryo - the most controversial type of stem cell research, because embryos are destroyed when stem cells are extracted from them.

Researchers in Michigan can conduct embryonic stem cell research, but they have to use stem cell lines created elsewhere.

Sean Morrison, director of the University of Michigan Center for Stem Cell Biology, believes those limits hurt the state.

"As long as researchers in the state of Michigan are dependent on stem cell lines created out of state ... then we can't remain a leader in this area," he told The News.

A bill sponsored by Rep. Andrew Meisner, D-Ferndale, would ease restrictions on embryonic stem cell research.

In her state-of-the-state speech last week, Gov. Jennifer Granholm - who has previously opposed such research - urged legislators to take action.

"Stem cell research holds the promise for finding cures and for improving the lives of thousands of people,"

Granholm said. "Talented researchers and businesses around the world are working right now on those cures, but we can't recruit them to Michigan to do their work because of the limits Michigan law puts on them. When human lives are at stake, we should lead the nation in this work, not put obstacles in our own path."

Groups opposing changes to the law - including Right to Life of Michigan and the Michigan Catholic Conference - argue that destroying human embryos is immoral.

Yet thousands of excess embryos, byproducts of in vitro fertilization, are already being thrown away each year. These embryos could be saved to use for research - assuming that Michigan law allows that to happen.

The state is investing heavily in life sciences research, putting some \$90 million into companies and universities over the next two years alone. Although this emerging industry is no panacea to the state's economic woes, it has grown to more than 500 businesses employing roughly 32,000 workers, according to MichBio, an Ann Arbor-based statewide trade group.

The competition from other states is fierce. California, for example, is backing that industry with \$3 billion approved by voters in 2004. What's more, the majority of states permit the type of embryonic stem cell research that's outlawed in Michigan.

For the sake of people like Kathleen Russell, Michigan lawmakers need to support the work of researchers in this state.

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