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Michigan lawmakers renew embryonic stem cell research fight

TIM MARTIN

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LANSING — A group of Democratic state lawmakers is reviving efforts to try and remove barriers on embryonic stem cell research in Michigan.

The long-running debate over the research at the state and federal levels has exposed a philosophical rift about the research. Many Republicans and some Democrats would rather focus on stem cell research that doesn't involve embryos, which they say raises ethical concerns.

But the group announcing the reintroduction of legislation today insists that embryonic research holds the most promise for medical research related to diabetes, spinal injuries and a host of other maladies.

Michigan has some of the most restrictive rules in the nation for embryonic stem cell research. Supporters of the research say it would help Michigan attract life science companies and boost the state's economy.

Former U.S. Rep. Joe Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, is a physician and member of the nonprofit group Michigan Citizens for Stem Cell Research and Cures, which supports changing state laws.

"You have every right to object," Schwarz told the Enquirer last year. "Object as you will. But that doesn't mean you should stop the majority from being able to promote this research. It literally is a tyranny of the minority."

Rep. Andy Meisner, D-Ferndale, introduced similar bills in the last session of the Legislature, but they did not advance in a chamber that then was under Republican control.

Democrats hold a 58-52 advantage in the chamber this year, but that is no guarantee Meisner's bills will pass. House Speaker Andy Dillon, a Democrat from Redford, has said he would not block a vote on embryonic stem cell research but that he would vote against the bills as introduced last session.

Meisner has changed the bills this year in the hopes of getting broader support.

Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm has called on the Legislature to remove the barriers on embryonic stem cell research. But the efforts are opposed by groups such as the Michigan Catholic Conference and Right to Life of Michigan.

The Catholic Conference says embryonic stem cell research is a "severely flawed ideology." The group also says that scientific advances are being made with adult stem cell research and that should be the state's focus.