

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

POSTED: 1:27 p.m., Mar. 9, 2009
LAST MODIFIED: 2:32 p.m., Mar. 9, 2009

University of Michigan to launch embryonic stem cell programs

By Jeff Karoub
Associated Press Writer

(AP) — The **University of Michigan** announced Monday it was launching the state's first major embryonic stem cell research program since voters eased restrictions on such work in November.

The Ann Arbor university unveiled plans the same day President Barack Obama signed an executive order that ends former President George W. Bush's limits on using federal dollars for stem cell research.

The university's **A. Alfred Taubman Medical Research Institute** said it's forming the Consortium for Stem Cell Therapy to create new embryonic stem cell lines as researchers seek treatments and cures for numerous diseases.

The consortium, which will be based in the university's medical school, is expected to begin this spring. University officials say \$2 million has been secured for hiring new scientists and technicians and other startup costs, and additional fundraising is under way.

"Truly, the stars are all aligned today," institute director Eva Feldman said by phone from California, where the University of Michigan's institute operates a laboratory with the **University of California, San Diego** to perform stem cell work researchers have been unable to do in Michigan.

"What we can now do is begin efforts in Michigan — double the action and get twice as much done."

Michigan voters on Nov. 4 approved Proposal 2, which changed state law to allow people to donate embryos left over from fertility treatments for scientific research. Those embryos, which may or may not be suitable for implantation, otherwise would be thrown away as medical waste.

Obama's action on Monday reverses Bush's 2001 directive that banned federal funding for research into stem lines created after that date. Bush limited the use of taxpayer money to only the 21 stem cell lines that had been produced before his decision.

Feldman said the consortium will allow her to develop nerve cells from both embryonic and adult stem cells for treating neurological disorders.

Taubman, a retail mogul and philanthropist, donated millions to the passage of Proposal 2 and the center that bears his name. He said Obama's order allows the institute to get federal funding for research that has been restricted up until now.

"This means we can expand our operations ... and open up opportunities in Michigan," he said.

Among other concerns, critics have said they oppose the destruction of human embryos and fear Michigan's researchers will not be properly regulated.

Michigan Catholic Conference Vice President for Public Policy Paul Long said in a statement Monday that Obama's order "places ideology and political posturing ahead of proven scientific therapeutic advancements" that don't require destroying embryos.