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Levin aims to overturn stem cell ban

U.S. Sen Carl Levin hosted a legislative luncheon aimed at defeating Michigan's ban on embryonic stem-cell research Friday at the Detroit Regional Chamber's Mackinac Policy Conference.

Levin called the research "utilizing something that would otherwise be destroyed for a life-giving purpose."

There's also an economic reason to lift the ban, he said. Other states, Levin said, are "literally investing hundreds of millions of dollars in stem cell research," and that Michigan is likely to "lose some of our best researchers" due to the restrictions placed on stem cell research here.

"We're going to lose economically, folks, if we don't repeal this prohibition," Levin said. "This is going to be another economic blow to a state that can't take any more economic blows."

And, Levin said, the research "is going to happen with us or without us."

State Rep. Andy Meisner, D-Ferndale, has introduced a package of three bills to lift the ban.

Opposition to the ban is mostly along partisan lines, and in at least some cases apparently involves the fear of retaliation from religious conservatives. Meisner said he was disappointed that he couldn't find even one Republican in the state House to cosponsor his bills, "when I know behind the scenes many of my Republican colleagues are very supportive."

Meisner said diversifying Michigan into life sciences has been a bipartisan drive under both the current Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm and her Republican predecessor, John Engler. "Here we are trying to diversify and invest in the life sciences, but we've got our hands tied behind our backs in the most innovative and promising area of the field," Meisner said.

Ford Motor Co. board member Edsel Ford II and his wife attended the luncheon and pledged support for the initiative to repeal the ban.

Ford is championing the "One D" regional development effort at the conference.

There's a Web site behind the effort to repeal the ban, at www.stemcellresearchformichigan.com.