

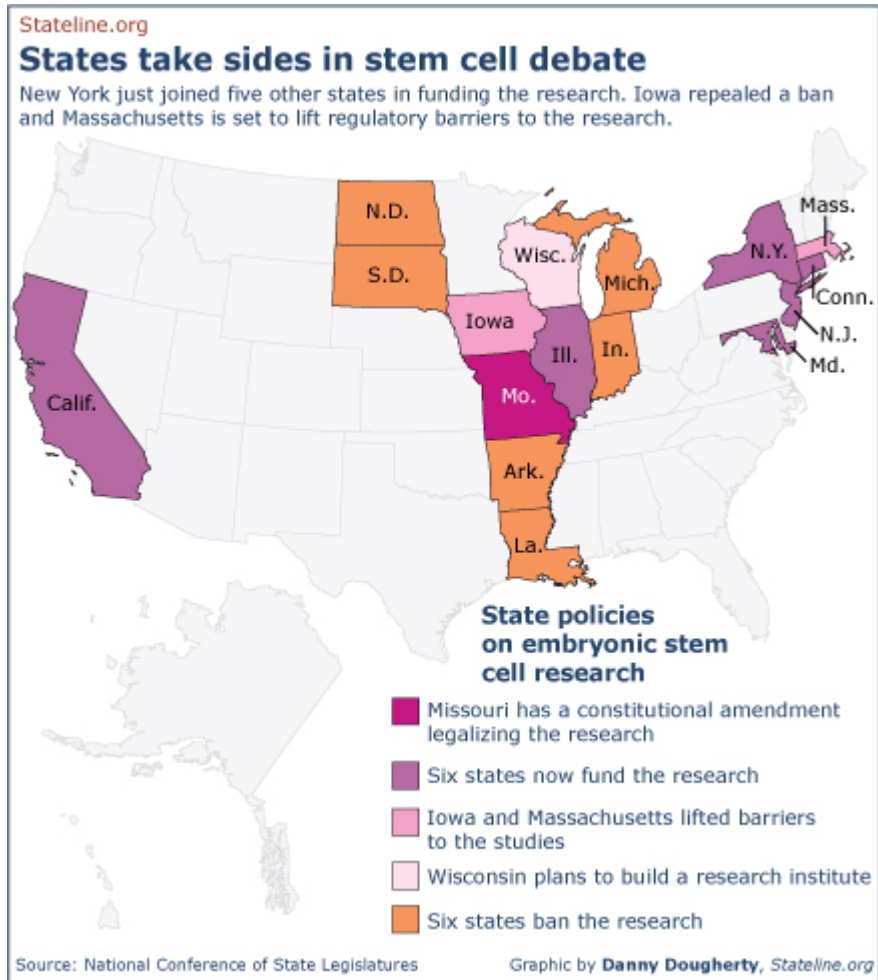


More govts boost stem cell research

By Christine Vestal, Stateline.org Staff Writer

As Congress and the Bush administration remain deadlocked over funding for stem cell research, three new Democratic governors have joined other state leaders in supporting the controversial science.

Last week, New York's Eliot Spitzer won legislative approval for \$600 million for stem cell research and Deval Patrick of Massachusetts began trying to undo a state regulation that hinders the research there. Iowa Gov. Chet Culver signed a law in February repealing that state's ban on the nascent science.



All three – newcomers to the governor's mansion -- pledged to support stem cell research in their election campaigns. They join a half-dozen other governors from both parties – including California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R), Connecticut Gov. Jodi Rell (R), Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley (D), Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D), Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle (D) and New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine (D) -- who have backed the research for its promised medical breakthroughs and potential economic rewards.

Since August 9, 2001, when President George W. Bush curtailed federal funding of stem cell research, states have stepped in to keep the fledgling science afloat by providing state money and removing legal barriers to its practice.

Last July, Bush exercised his first presidential veto by refusing to sign a bill that would have

expanded federal funding for the science. This year, the new Democratic-led U.S. House passed the same bill – releasing money for stem cell research using surplus embryos from in vitro fertilization clinics – and the U.S. Senate is expected to approve the same bill. But political analysts say Congress is not likely to muster enough votes to override a promised presidential veto.

Although a recent [ABC survey](#) showed the American public favors government funding of stem cell studies by a margin of two to one, Bush and his anti-abortion allies remain opposed because they say it violates the sanctity of human life by destroying embryos.

Democrats are united in supporting the science, along with such high-profile Republicans as Nancy Reagan, whose loved ones have had Alzheimers' and other diseases that might be ameliorated by the research.

New York's new budget measure will make the Empire State the sixth state – California, New Jersey, Illinois, Connecticut and Maryland are the others -- to finance stem cell research. It would create the second largest state research fund in the country - \$600 million over 11 years. California's grant program is the largest, setting aside \$3 billion over 10 years to support the research.

Wisconsin -- where the research was developed -- does not provide state grants, but Doyle has set secured and private money to build a research institute where stem cell studies may be conducted.

Both Spitzer and his predecessor, Republican Gov. George Pataki, pushed lawmakers to approve stem cell funding in part to attract investment to the state's economically depressed upstate region, home to stem cell leaders Cornell University, University of Rochester and other medical research centers.

Patrick's proposed change to public health rules would lift a barrier to the research created by his Republican predecessor, presidential hopeful Mitt Romney, an opponent of stem cell research.

In 2005, the Massachusetts legislature overrode Romney's veto and repealed a previous law requiring local district attorneys to approve all scientific research involving human embryos. The new law set up ethical guidelines and granted blanket approval to studies involving surplus human embryos from in vitro fertilization clinics. Romney subsequently moved administratively to block the research.

At Patrick's request, the Massachusetts Dept. of Health and Human Services is expected to nullify Romney's action. In February, Culver signed a law repealing a 2002 stem cell research ban. Iowa's new law removes the state from a list of six – Michigan, Arkansas, Louisiana, Indiana, North Dakota and South Dakota -- that currently ban the science.

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