

# CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

## Stem-cell law holds state back, MichBio panelists say

By Andrew Dietderich

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GRAND RAPIDS — Panelists at the second MichBio Expo left little doubt Thursday as to how they felt about embryonic stem-cell research and development in Michigan: The state is losing millions of dollars by banning it and the law needs to change.

"If we don't do it, somebody else can, and somebody else will," said Edward Goldman, health systems attorney for the **University of Michigan**. "Michigan is not on a level playing field. That's a serious problem for our ability to compete, to create new industries and for our ability to remain at the forefront in this area."

Since 1998, Michigan has banned embryonic stem-cell research. A facility doing research can be fined as much as \$5 million.

UM Professor Sean Morrison said the embryos that do not have the potential to develop fully for whatever reason allow scientists to see how cells react to variables, such as certain diseases, with hopes that potential cures or treatments can be developed. Now, embryos that are created and not used are discarded as medical waste.

Panelists said top researchers have left or will leave Michigan for states and countries where embryonic stem-cell research is tolerated and encouraged.

For example, California voters in 2004 approved \$3 billion to be spent on embryonic stem-cell research. Last year, Michael Clarke, former professor of internal medicine at U-M, joined the **Stanford University** School of Medicine.

Further, new and graduate college students will look elsewhere if interested in this kind of research. Top student researchers who graduate from the state's schools will do the same, said James Eliason, chief scientific officer at Detroit-based **Asterand plc**.

"We are creating a pool of talent that we're exporting to other states," Eliason said.

U.S. Rep Joe Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, discussed the political issues surrounding stem-cell research, which he favors. He expects federal laws that were introduced this year to be introduced again next year and also to be vetoed by President Bush again.

However, he said he believes federal legislation will pass in 2009, whether the next president is a Republican or Democrat.

"I can think of nothing more pro-life than embryonic stem-cell research," Schwarz said.