

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Time for state debate on stem-cell research

6:00 am, September 18, 2006

Detroit's domestic automakers are still in flux. As current events shape their future, Michigan needs to accelerate strategies to expand other economic sectors.

A good start was the announcement earlier this month of the first 61 grant recipients to share \$100 million in state grants from the 21st Century Jobs Fund for projects ranging from life sciences to alternative energy.

But to truly develop life sciences in Michigan, the state will need a full and open debate on current laws that restrict embryonic stem-cell research that could lead to finding new treatments and cures for diseases and injuries.

Today, a new coalition will kick off a campaign its hopes will lead to Michigan's relaxation of those laws. (*This Just In, Page 2.*) The coalition includes top names in research at the state's major medical centers and universities as well as nonprofits known for funding research in such illnesses as juvenile diabetes and multiple sclerosis. It also includes some philanthropic powerhouses from the Detroit area: Cynthia Ford and Doreen Hermelin.

Because retrieving embryonic stem cells requires the destruction of embryos, it has become a highly charged political issue. Supporters of the research contend many embryos in reproductive facilities will be destroyed anyway.

A lot of venture-capital and private-equity dollars are looking for life-science investments right now. But Michigan may be overlooked because its laws limit the ability of researchers to use an important tool — embryonic stem cells.

Meanwhile, voters in New Jersey and California have approved funding for adult and embryonic stem-cell research through the sale of bonds. Connecticut passed a law to provide modest grants to do the same. By executive order, the governor of Illinois created the Illinois Regenerative Medicine Institute. Indiana lawmakers created an adult stem-cell research center at Indiana University.

The debate in Michigan is long overdue.