



California Can Retain Lead in Stem Cell Research by Preparing High Schoolers for Lab Jobs

As Obama lifts ban, biotech firms say more skilled workers needed now

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By: Office of Senator Gloria Romero

SACRAMENTO, March 9, 2009 - Senator Gloria Romero (D-East Los Angeles), Chair of the Senate Education Committee, applauded President Obama's action today lifting federal restrictions on stem cell research and urged California public schools to help create a workforce for the emerging stem cell field. Romero called for support for legislation (SB 471) she recently introduced with Sen. President pro tem Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento).

California leads the nation in stem cell research due to \$3 billion in public funding voters approved with Proposition 71 in 2004, after President Bush limited federal research funds in 2001. President Obama's reversal of those limits will lead other states to move quickly to catch up to California.

"This is the Golden State," said Romero. "California's next Gold Rush will be found in the Petri dishes and laboratories of this great state, which will produce the next generation of scientists, technicians and trained professionals capable of translating stem cell research into therapies and cures."

In February, Romero and Steinberg introduced SB 471, which will help ensure that California has a workforce with the education and technical training necessary to fill positions in the stem cell field. A January BayBio report predicts a shortage of trained professionals to fill jobs in the life sciences sector in California, especially laboratory technicians.

"I commend Sen. Romero for forging new paths for California students to reach the jobs of tomorrow," said Steinberg. "Regenerative medicine holds promise not only for long-awaited cures, but for our economy as well-- if we're smart and we build a homegrown workforce to help this emerging sector thrive."

SB 471 calls on education officials to collaborate with the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, the state stem cell agency, to advance education initiatives at public high schools and universities.

Romero and Steinberg also are urging the State Board of Education to include stem cell biology in high-school science curriculum. The board is expected to act this week to adopt guidelines that will begin revision of the Science Framework, which governs K-12 science curriculum.

With funding from Proposition 71, California scientists have made great advances toward developing life-saving cures and treatments for diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's and other diseases. Prop. 71 jumpstarted an industry with enormous potential to be an economic engine for California's future.

"California will fully realize the medical and economic promise of stem cell research only if it has a workforce with the education and technical training necessary to translate discoveries into therapies and cures," said Romero. "President Obama's action today makes it even more urgent to promote stem cell education and career paths for students so that California retains its premier position in this emerging field."