

AAAS NEWS AND NOTES

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SCIENCE POLICY

AAAS Urges Bush to Support Embryonic Stem Cell Research

The election of a new president has reopened the debate about whether the federal government should fund research on embryonic stem cells, and AAAS is in the thick of it.

In a letter dated 6 March, three officers of the AAAS board wrote to President George W. Bush in support of federal funding for stem cell research, including cells from embryonic, fetal, and adult sources. The letter responded to President Bush's order for a review of a Clinton Administration decision that allows funding of research on embryonic stem cells under guidelines that were published in the Federal Register in August 2000: "It would be tragic to squander this opportunity to pursue work that can potentially help millions of Americans in need," wrote Mary L. Good, chair of the AAAS Board, Peter H. Raven, president of AAAS, and Floyd E. Bloom, president-elect of AAAS.

Not everyone agrees, and events in early March seemed to illustrate the maelstrom that characterizes the debate over human embryo research. On 6 March, according to press reports, Health and Human Services Secretary (HHS) Tommy G. Thompson testified before a Senate hearing, during which he seemed to contradict President Bush's apparent opposition to embryonic stem cell research. Two days later, opponents of funding for any research that uses embryonic stem cells filed a lawsuit in Washington, DC, against HHS and the National Institutes of Health to stop the federal government from sponsoring such research.

All this took place the week before researchers were due to turn in grant proposals to HHS for funding their stem cell research projects.

Why would AAAS enter the fray?

"Having the elected officers of the Association make such a public statement is to assert in a meaningful manner that the opportunities for organ repair by stem cells vastly outweigh the apparent ethical risk of using unneeded by-products of in vitro fertilization efforts to derive the cells," says AAAS President-Elect Bloom.

The Bush Administration is reviewing decisions made under the Clinton Administration that allowed federal funding, but only if the cells were harvested by private parties from frozen embryos created for the purpose of in vitro fertilization. As of mid-March, no decision had been made.

The debate pits abortion opponents against patients' advocates, scientists, and others who support embryonic stem cell research. According to the letter from the AAAS officers, the discovery of embryonic stem cells, capable of giving rise to virtually any tissue type, "may be the most important scientific and medical breakthrough in the past decade or more."

Mark S. Frankel, director of the Scientific Freedom, Responsibility and Law Pro-

gram of the AAAS Directorate for Science and Policy Programs, notes that the Association's position on stem cell research had been laid out in a 1999 report entitled *Stem Cell Research and Applications: Monitoring the Frontiers of Biomedical Research*. He called the letter from the AAAS leadership to President Bush "particularly timely."

"This position is consistent with AAAS's mission to advance scientific knowledge and to do so responsibly, and it was appropriate for the AAAS Board to go on record with the new administration about what direction we believe policy should go," Frankel said.

Based on months of study by scientists, ethicists, and theologians, the November 1999 report recommends federal funding for stem cell research and concludes that it is possible to conduct embryonic stem cell research in a fully ethical manner.

A copy of the report was enclosed with the 6 March letter from the AAAS leadership. It is also available at the following Web address: <http://www.aaas.org/spp/dspp/sfirl/projects/stem/main.htm>.

SCIENCE AND THE MEDIA

Science Writing Award Winners Honored

On 16 February, during an awards ceremony held at the AAAS Annual Meeting in San Francisco, AAAS recognized 10 journalists for their outstanding contributions to science journalism in 2000. Sponsored by The Whitaker Foundation, the AAAS Science Journalism Awards in 2000 honored the journalists listed below in five of the six categories that make up the awards program (there was no award given this year in the online category).

Newspapers with a circulation of more than 100,000: Rick Weiss and Deborah Nelson of *The Washington Post* won for their series "Gene Therapy" (29 September, 21 November 1999, and 7 March 2000).

Newspapers with a circulation of less than 100,000: James B. Erickson of *The Arizona Daily Star* was recognized for "Signs of Life" (5 to 7 March 2000).

Magazines: Mark Schoofs of *The Village Voice* won for the article, "AIDS: The Agony of Africa" (30 November and 7 and 21 December 1999).

Radio: Moira K. Rankin and David Barrett Wilson of SOUNDPRINT Media Center, Inc., were recognized for their series "Exploring the Universe" (28 January, 23 June, and 28 July 2000).

Television: Gino Del Guercio of Boston Science Communications, Eliene Augenbraun and Ira Flatow of SciencCentral, and Richard Hudson of Twin Cities Public Television/PBS won for their documentary "Transistorized!" (8 November 1999).



Left to right (front row), Moira K. Rankin, Ira Flatow, Rick Weiss, and Eliene Augenbraun; (back row) David Barrett Wilson, James B. Erickson, Mark Schoofs, Gino Del Guercio, and Deborah Nelson.