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Action Needed to Continue Breakthrough Research

(West Windsor, NJ) – U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12) today sent a letter to Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer urging them to bring stem cell research legislation to the floor when the House returns from its August recess.

“While the Obama Administration plans to appeal the decision, Congress must act quickly to permanently restore funding for this cutting edge research... As a representative of some of the leading life science companies in the country, I am troubled that we may be saying to them, and the countless companies that will be formed by researchers, that we are closed for business,” Holt wrote.

A copy of the letter is below:

August 27, 2010

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi

Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

H-232, The Capitol

Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Steny H. Hoyer

House Democratic Majority Leader

H-107, The Capitol

Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Hoyer:

In light of the troubling ruling this week that blocks federal funding for stem cell research, I am writing to request respectfully that you bring the bipartisan Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2009, H.R. 873, or similar legislation to the floor of the House for a vote at the soonest possible date.

As a scientist, I was honored to attend the White House Ceremony where President Obama signed the executive order lifting the eight year ban on federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. In doing so the President drew from the declaration in his Inaugural Address that we will “restore science to its rightful place” and reawakened the hope of millions for the potential treatments or cures that might result for such diseases as cancer, Parkinson’s disease, and diabetes.

Yet, the flawed ruling this week by U.S. District Court Judge Lamberth has again put the future cures and therapies on hold. While the Obama Administration plans to appeal the decision, Congress must act quickly to permanently restore funding for this cutting edge research.

Most Americans seem to be coming to the conclusion that restricting any stem cell research and therapeutic cloning would be a grave mistake. Yet, because of the court ruling the NIH has already announced that 143 grants worth \$95 million currently up for renewal will be frozen and in September another 22 grants totaling \$54 million will be frozen. NIH Director Francis Collins said “this decision has just poured sand into that engine of discovery.”

Further, the uncertainty about federal funding may cause leading researchers to take their research abroad to more accommodating countries, and take with them the economic growth and job creation that will come as research becomes actual therapies and treatments. As a representative of some of the leading life science companies in the country, I am troubled that we may be saying to them, and the countless companies that will be formed by researchers, that we are closed for business. In the current economy, we need to do everything we can to foster job creation, especially in innovative research businesses.

The opponents of this type of research say that we should pursue alternative avenues for research, such as adult stem cells, cord blood cells, and amniotic fluid cells. These types of cells have shown promise for limited, specific types of applications. We should investigate each one of them. Yet, that is not a compelling reason to block researchers from pursuing embryonic stem cell research, which experts agree holds the greatest potential because the cells are able to become any other type of cell in the body.

Again, I ask you to bring legislation to the House floor as soon as possible in September to permanently restore funding for this cutting edge research.

Sincerely,

RUSH HOLT

Member of Congress

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