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Stem Cell Research- A New Investment in North Carolina

“Stem cell research is too promising for North Carolina to sit back and let other states take the initiative on this groundbreaking research. As we have done with the innovative Cancer Center, I propose that North Carolina become a leader in stem cell research by creating the North Carolina Stem Cell Research Fund. We are a prime location for expanded stem cell research because we have solid infrastructure in world-class schools and research facilities. Stem cell research has simply too much potential to not invest in it. Not only will it bring a great industry to our state, but more importantly, it can save lives and cure diseases. As Lieutenant Governor, I will make investing in this groundbreaking research a top priority.”

-Sen. Walter Dalton

Proposal

State Senator Walter Dalton proposes that North Carolina become a leader in stem cell research technology. His plans include:

- Creation of a North Carolina Stem Cell Research Fund to provide grants-in-aid to existing research firms, universities, and hospitals as well as firms that decide to locate to North Carolina with proven track records in stem cell research
- Initial funding of \$15 million dollars annually, on par with or better than states like Connecticut, Illinois, and Maryland
- The Fund will include an advisory committee, which will oversee intellectual property rights and ethical considerations in any state-funded stem cell research
- Research will be for all existing types of stem cell research, including the emerging field of amniotic stem cell research, and funding for the grants will be merit based
- Funding can increase based on statewide need and budget considerations

Why Stem Cell Research?

North Carolina has already become a national leader in medicine, science, and technology. As a state, we have partnered with private industry to bring jobs and new research facilities to North Carolina. The Research Triangle and the Cancer Center would not be possible without the co-equal partnerships between the state and private industry.

As research in the biosciences and healthcare fields continue to blossom in North Carolina, it is time that we fully commit to and invest in groundbreaking research that is already taking place in our state. Stem cell research has too much potential for North Carolina not to be at the forefront of this emerging technology. Furthermore, North Carolina has already laid a significant foundation for expanded research due to our first-class universities and research facilities.

Recently, Senator Dalton visited with Dr. Anthony Atala, the head of the Wake Forest Institute of Regenerative Medicine. Sen. Dalton was able to tour the Institute and see firsthand some of the most groundbreaking regenerative medical research in America. The research that Dr. Atala and his staff are conducting is truly revolutionary and has the potential to completely transform the way medicine is approached. Dr. Atala has been able to create regenerated blood vessels and heart valves, and recently created the first lab-grown organ, a bladder, that was inserted into a human.

Furthermore, Dr. Atala's research paved the way for the use of amniotic stem cells, which if proven effective, can remove many of the ethical concerns that are presently associated with some forms of stem cell research. His research, as well as other research in North Carolina, is cutting-edge and has the potential to treat cancer, Parkinson's disease, diabetes, spinal cord injuries, and repair damaged tissue and muscle. But we must do more to ensure that North Carolina remains a research hub for the world.

Why Now?

Because stem cell research is expensive and capital intensive, it is imperative for the state of North Carolina to become financial partners in privately conducted research. Unfortunately, the federal government has restricted stem cell research. In the federal government's absence, many states have acted and funded stem cell research.

California, Illinois, Connecticut, Maryland, and New Jersey have specifically funded stem cell research. California in particular passed a very large bond issue that specifically funds stem cell research. Since doing so, the state has seen tremendous ancillary benefits from the bond; in particular many research firms have decided to move from other states to California because the state has shown its commitment to stem cell research.

North Carolina is already world-renowned for its research facilities, and creating state support for stem cell research will improve that reputation even more. It will attract new biotechnology research firms and help existing ones receive much needed funding to improve and expand their research. Creating the fund will send a clear signal showing researchers across the country that North Carolina is open for business when it comes to stem cell research. Finally, and most importantly, it has the potential to not only help save lives and improve the quality of life for North Carolinians, but help people across the world. The time to act is now.