



For Immediate Release  
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## Rep. Pitts: Who's running NIH?

*Congressman questions remarks made by NIH deputies on stem cells*

**Washington**—Congressman Joe Pitts (R, PA-16) said today that statements made by NIH officials on the federal government's policy on embryonic stem cell research contradict comments made by NIH director Zerhouni to him last month. The statements were reported in various media outlets this morning.

Congressman Pitts asked, "If Dr. Zerhouni is telling me one thing and these institute directors are telling Senator Specter something else, who's running the show? Dr. Zerhouni should be concerned that these directors have conspired to contradict him and undermine President Bush's stem cell policy.

"The saddest part of this whole thing is that we're still not debating the merits of destroying human embryos to harvest their stem cells. If these directors want to repeal a policy that hasn't blocked one research initiative from being done, they should provide better justification," said Congressman Pitts.

Here are the facts:

- **NIH has surplus embryonic stem cells available.** In response to a question from Congressman at a March 17, 2005 hearing of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health NIH Director Zerhouni told that NIH had yet to turn away any researcher requesting access to federally-funded embryonic stem cell lines. In fact, there are thousands of vials of embryo stem cells waiting to be claimed for research. "The current providers have a huge inventory of frozen vials of hESCs because the customer base is low." (Hearing transcript, [http://stemcells.nih.gov/policy/taskForce/tfSummaries/2004\\_07\\_20tfs.asp](http://stemcells.nih.gov/policy/taskForce/tfSummaries/2004_07_20tfs.asp))
- **Mouse feeder cells are not a non-starter.** In the same hearing, Dr. Zerhouni told the House that "all lines – to my knowledge every line available in the world, whether it be eligible for Federal funds or not, has been exposed to animal cell lines, mouse feeder cell lines. So they are not useless. They are very useful." Also, scientists have found that these cells can be diluted out of whatever vial contains the animal feeder cells. (Hearing transcript)

- **There are federally-funded embryo stem cell lines that haven't even been explored.** According to Dr. Zerhouni there are "31 cell derivations that have not been expanded. To our knowledge, to the best of our knowledge, there are 16 which we are told by the investigators at the University of Gutenberg that have not been exposed to animal products..." (Hearing transcript)
- **"Leftover" IVF embryos are no panacea.** There simply aren't enough of these embryos available to researchers. "The RAND-SART survey found that almost twice as many frozen embryos exist in the United States as the highest previous estimate. Only a small percentage of these embryos are available for research because the vast majority are reserved for family building. Among those that are in principle available for research, some have been in storage for more than a decade and were frozen using techniques that are less effective than those that are currently available" (<http://www.rand.org/publications/RB/RB9038/>).

"The fact remains that patients are being saved today with adult stem cells. No patient has received a treatment with embryonic stem cells despite decades of trying. As long as we have a surplus of embryonic stem cells available, why should we take money from clinicians saving lives today to fund research with only hypothetical promise tomorrow?" said Congressman Pitts, a member of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health.

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