

Vote to Promote Stem Cell Research

For Immediate Release: January 16, 2007

Contact: Kimberly Allen, (202) 226-8364; (202) 420-1524 [cell]

Rothman Votes to Promote Stem Cell Research

(Washington, DC)—On Thursday, January 11th, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) voted to expand the federal funding of ethical stem cell research. The bill, the DeGette-Castle Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (H.R. 3), would lift restrictions on embryonic stem cell lines that can be used for federally-funded research — restrictions that were imposed by President Bush in 2001. The House passed the bill with bipartisan support by a vote of 253 to 174.

"Embryonic stem cells do not come from fetuses as some people mistakenly believe. They are blastocysts, 3 to 5 day old groups of cells that can fit on a head of a pin. The overwhelming consensus of the world's scientists tell us that embryonic stem cells could help us better understand and potentially cure diseases such as Parkinson's, juvenile diabetes, and leukemia," said Rothman. "The federal government's limited backing of this new area of research must end. By supporting ethical stem cell research, the U.S. government could save lives and maintain America's role as a world leader in health care advances and technological development."

The DeGette-Castle bill only allows federal research funds for stem cell lines generated from embryos that would otherwise be discarded by fertility clinics. The bill also requires scientists conducting research to follow ethical standards under the guidance of the National Institutes of Health. For instance, individuals donating cells must give written informed consent, and cannot receive any financial or other incentive to make the donation.

"Without federal funds, promising stem cell research will be left entirely to the private sector and states to support. This approach means that fewer scientists and fewer labs will have the funding necessary to seek potentially life-saving cures for a whole range of deadly and debilitating diseases," added Rothman. "I strongly believe that President Bush was wrong to veto this bill last year. Now, Congress and the American people will give the President another chance to sign ethical stem cell research into law."

Rothman is a long-time supporter of ethical stem cell research. Last year, to increase public understanding of stem cell research and the ethical questions involved, Congressman Rothman and Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) led a roundtable discussion on the topic at Hackensack University Medical Center.

###

