March 19, 2001

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Tommy Thompson, Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Mr. President and Secretary Thompson:

Stem cell research is the wave of the future in biomedical research. As you know, there are three sources of stem cells - adult, fetal tissue and embryo. The National Institute of Health recently issued explicit guidelines for research involving stem cells derived from embryos and/or fetal tissue. They provide stringent requirements which enable scientists to conduct stem cell research within the constraints of careful federal oversight and standards.

We urge you to keep the guidelines in place and allow federal funding for this life-saving biomedical research.

Stem cell research offers unprecedented promise for so many of life's most devastating diseases and disabilities: Parkinson's disease, ALS, Huntington's Chorea, paralysis, blindness, diabetes, and numerous others. Stem cells are undifferentiated cells, which, given the proper signal, are potentially capable of becoming any specialized cell, such as brain and blood cells. As such, their potential for saving lives is unlimited.

While we appreciate your support of research using stem cells from spontaneous abortions and from adult stem cells, limiting research to these two sources will severely impede progress. First, tissue from spontaneous abortions is seldom usable due to the
genetic abnormalities that caused the miscarriage in the first place. Second, while scientists have been guardedly encouraged by recent findings with adult stem cells, this line of research is in its very early stages and far from definitive. It is the prevailing expert scientific opinion that we do not know if adult stem cells have the same potential as embryonic stem cells.

Embryonic stem cells have the ability to develop into virtually any cell in the body. As they are developmentally the earliest of all cells (earlier than adult and fetal stem cells) they have the greatest potential to become different body cells. Embryonic stem cells themselves are not embryos and cannot independently become embryos.

Embryonic stem cells are extracted from embryos that are only a few days old. These embryos are produced during in vitro fertilization, a process that creates many more fertilized eggs than are implanted into women trying to become pregnant. Unused embryos are placed into storage. Most of these microscopic clumps of cells are destined to be destroyed - ending any potential for life.

Until now, cures for so many devastating afflictions have been at best just dreams. But now, the discovery of stem cells has transformed these dreams into a reality. As we enter the new millennium, we implore you not to shut any doors on research using stem cells. Please support our scientists and allow them to proceed with full vigor and urgency. Millions of lives depend on it.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your advisors to discuss this critical issue. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jim McDermott
Member of Congress

Bill Pascrell Jr. (D-NJ)
Michael Capuano (D-MA)
John Spratt (D-SC)
Rick Larsen (D-WA)
Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)
Bob Filner (D-CA)
Karen Thurman (D-FL)
Sander Levin (D-MI)
Thomas Allen (D-ME)
Carolyn Maloney (D-NY)
Robert Matsui (D-CA)
Congressional Letter to President Bush on Maintaining NIH Guidelines on Embryonic Stem Cell Research

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Silvestre Reyes (D-TX)
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