

By Ted Agres

NEWS

Scientist scolded for supporting Santorum

Jaenisch insists his help on the conservative senator's stem cell bill does not discourage embryonic stem cell work

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Several noted scientists in the field of human embryonic stem cells (hESC), including [Rudolf Jaenisch](#), ventured to Capitol Hill last week (June 15) to lend support to a compromise Senate bill co-authored by conservative senator Rick Santorum (R-Penn.), designed to break the [political logjam](#) blocking additional Federal hESC research funding. Their appearance, however, is being criticized as potentially jeopardizing other legislation (HR [810](#), S [471](#)) that would expand Federal funding to newly derived hESC cell lines in addition to the [22 currently eligible cell lines](#).

"Dr. Jaenisch is a leading scientist, and with him standing next to Sen. Santorum, there's a risk that some senators might have the mistaken impression that [his bill] is a total substitute for the bill that would lift funding restrictions," Bernard Siegel, executive director of the [Genetics Policy Institute](#), told *The Scientist*.

Santorum's alternative research bill (S [2754](#)), co-authored by Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Penn.), would direct the National Institutes of Health to promote ways of deriving hESCs without destroying human embryos, while permitting other research to continue. Neither this bill nor the bill to expand funding for ESC research has been brought to the Senate floor for a vote.

Jaenisch, a biology professor at the [Whitehead Institute](#) and MIT, spoke with other scientists at a [panel](#) organized by Santorum, chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, to discuss alternative methods of deriving pluripotent or embryonic-like stem cells without destroying human embryos. Jaenisch and colleagues at Whitehead last year [successfully demonstrated](#) in mice a technique known as altered nuclear transfer (ANT), in which stem cells are extracted from non-viable embryos.

First proposed by Stanford University professor [William Hurlbut](#), who also serves on the [President's Council on Bioethics](#), ANT has been called a possible "ethical alternative" to somatic cell nuclear transfer. "The point of this bill is that there may be ways to both advance science and find at least one small island of unity in a sea of controversy," Hurlbut said at last week's panel discussion.

While endorsing the Santorum-Specter bill, Jaenisch said he supported other bills to increase Federal hESC research funding. "It would be highly unfortunate if

implementation of [the Santorum-Specter] bill would be used to delay or even block ongoing promising cell research," Jaenisch told the panel. In a subsequent email to *The Scientist*, Jaenisch expressed hope that his appearance on the panel would not be misconstrued. "I strongly back the [bill to expand federal funding] for human stem cell research and I surely hope that this position [will] not be misunderstood by senators," Jaenisch wrote.

Other scientists on the panel included [Markus Grompe](#), a genetics professor at Oregon Health and Science University, and [Alan Russell](#), director of the [McGowan Institute for Regenerative Medicine](#) at the University of Pittsburgh. Grompe, who conducts research using adult stem cells, told the panel he opposes embryo destruction. Russell expressed skepticism that the adult body contains cells equivalent to embryonic stem cells, but he declined to specify where he stood on the issue. "I advocate for patients, rather than for cells," he told *The Scientist*.

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Links within this article:

Rudolf Jaenisch
<http://www.wi.mit.edu/research/faculty/jaenisch.html>

T. Agres, "Prospects murky for US stem cell funding," *The Scientist*, June 8, 2006
<http://www.the-scientist.com/news/display/23595/>

"Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2005" (HR 810)
<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c109:h.r.810:>

"Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2005" (S 471)
<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c109:s.471:>

NIH Human Embryonic Stem Cell Registry
<http://stemcells.nih.gov/research/registry>

Genetics Policy Institute
<http://www.genpol.org/>

Alternative Pluripotent Stem Cell Therapies Enhancement Act (S 2754)
<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c109:S.2754:>

Whitehead Institute
<http://www.wi.mit.edu/about/index.html>

Santorum panel
<http://santorum.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressOffice.View&ContentRec>

[ord_id=1866&Region_id=0&Issue_id=0](#)

D. Monroe, "Cloned, fertilized stem cells look the same," *The Scientist*, January 17, 2006
www.thescientist.com/news/display/22971/

William Hurlbut

<http://www.stanford.edu/~ethics/Site/Main.html>

President's Council on Bioethics

<http://www.bioethics.gov/>

Markus Grompe

<http://www.ohsu.edu/genetics/grompe/index.html>

Alan J. Russell

<http://newsbureau.upmc.com/Bios/BioRussell.htm>

McGowan Institute for Regenerative Medicine

<http://www.mirm.pitt.edu/>