 Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

## Effort backs stem-cell research at Scripps

By [Susan R. Miller](#)  
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Wednesday, July 20, 2005

Florida voters will be asked next year whether taxpayer dollars should fund embryonic stem-cell research at Scripps — but only if the drive, led by County Commissioner Burt Aaronson, secures 611,000 signatures and overcomes certain opposition from Gov. Jeb Bush.

This week a group called Floridians for Stem Cell Research and Cures Inc. kicked off a statewide initiative similar to the one in California that resulted in last year's passage of an amendment providing state money to support embryonic stem-cell research.



**UPDATED WEEKLY**

Browse  
Specials  
& Deals  
From Local  
Dealerships

**Autos**  
PalmBeachPost.com

### Should The Scripps Research Institute experiment with stem cells?

- Yes, the potential benefits can't be ignored**
- No, it is morally troubling**
- Not sure**

Vote

Voter Limit: Once per Day  
[View Poll Results](#)

#### More Florida news

- [Latest state headlines](#)
- [P.B. County, TCoast news](#)
- [Storm 2005: Hurricane news](#)
- [Special reports](#)
- [Weather](#) | [Traffic](#) | [Obituaries](#)

The nascent Florida group was conceived by Aaronson. He decided the amendment was needed after hearing the Republican governor speak at the annual Biotech Industry Organization meeting last month in Philadelphia, where he said he would not devote tax dollars to stem-cell research at The Scripps Research Institute's Florida campus while in office.

"I am not prepared to sit idly by while the governor dictates what research Scripps can and cannot do at its new home in Palm Beach County," said Aaronson, a Democrat. "It isn't up to the governor to decide something like this."

A spokesman for the governor said Bush's position on stem-cell research was well known when he recruited Scripps and hasn't changed.

In 2001, the governor's brother, President Bush, banned federal money for stem-cell research except for existing cell lines. Congress is working on legislation that would lift the restriction.

Proponents of stem-cell research say it could lead to cures for everything from Alzheimer's to Parkinson's. Opponents argue it is inherently unethical because they consider an embryo a human being.

Aaronson is joined in his effort by Bernard Siegel, founder and executive director of the Genetics Policy Institute in Wellington, and Boca Raton lawyer Henry Handler.

In December 2002, Siegel gained international attention when he filed a lawsuit against members of the Raelian movement who claimed to have cloned a 31-year-old woman, producing an infant they called Eve.

Siegel drafted a petition requesting protective custody in what he had hoped would be the first case to establish the rights of a cloned human. His case ended when the company was unable to prove it had produced the child, but Siegel went on to lobby for stem-cell research.

"When you have a form of research that is so vitally needed and can't advance because of some people's opposition, you need a democratic way to present this to voters," Siegel said. "That's what they did in California. They made it a constitutional right, and that's what we propose to do in Florida."

The organization must solve myriad challenges, including funding, ballot language and community support.

Handler's law firm was recruited to provide legal services and draft the ballot language. Handler also has a personal stake: He has a daughter who suffers from a genetically passed metabolic disorder that can cause brain damage. He is doing the work for free.

Before the group can even begin to raise money, it has to register with the state as a political action committee, which Handler expects to take two weeks. The petition has to be drafted and submitted for approval before the group can begin to collect the more than 611,000 signatures needed to get the question on the ballot.

The ballot language then has to be vetted by Florida Attorney General Charlie Crist, a Republican who is running for governor in 2008. It also must be approved by the Florida Supreme Court — all before a Feb. 1 deadline.

"It's going to be very close," Aaronson admits.

The organization also will have to overcome the perception that embryonic stem-cell research equals cloning. "We are going to specifically say that the amendment shall prohibit any type of human cloning," Handler said.

His challenge will be to accomplish that in 75 words or fewer and adhere to the single-subject rule, meaning it must address just one topic and not mislead voters.

In recent years, Florida voters have passed numerous constitutional amendments, ranging from parental notification for pregnant teens to extending constitutional protection to pregnant pigs. Some have questioned whether the process has been abused.

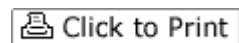
"I think that things get on the ballot out of frustration," said Kenneth Goodman, director of the Florida Bioethics Network and director of the University of Miami Bioethics Program. "The constitution is a clumsy and inefficient way to make public policy, but people turn to it when they feel they are at the end of their tether."

Aaronson said he would prefer to see the issue resolved by the legislature when it convenes for next year's session. He hopes that any groundswell his organization can create will prompt legislators to take up the cause.

"If not, we are going forward with this," Aaronson said.

**Find this article at:**

[http://www.palmbeachpost.com/politics/content/state/epaper/2005/07/20/m1a\\_stemcell\\_0720.html](http://www.palmbeachpost.com/politics/content/state/epaper/2005/07/20/m1a_stemcell_0720.html)



[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.