Obama OKs embryonic stem cell research

by UPI

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Obama lifted a ban on embryonic stem cell research Monday, calling his action important in advancing the cause of science in America.

"Today ... we will bring the change that so many scientists and researchers, doctors and innovators, patients and loved ones have hoped for, and fought for, these past eight years: we will lift the ban on federal funding for promising embryonic stem cell research," Obama said before signing the executive order rescinding the ban enacted by former President George Bush.

The executive order will overturn a restriction Bush enacted that limited federal funding to 21 cell lines already in existence when he signed the order. Some scientists believe embryonic stem cells could provide tissue to replace defective organs or cells because embryonic stem cells can morph into any type of cell present in the body.

In a swipe at the Bush administration -- accused of allowing personal beliefs overshadow scientific research -- Obama said "our government has forced what I believe is a false choice between sound science and moral values."

"In this case, I believe the two are not inconsistent," he said. "As a person of faith, I believe we are called to care for each other and work to ease human suffering."

The potential for embryonic stem cell research is great and, if with strict guidelines and strong oversight, "the perils can be avoided."

"I can also promise that we will never undertake this research lightly. We will support it only when it is both scientifically worthy and responsibly conducted," Obama said. "And we will ensure that our government never opens the door to the use of cloning for human reproduction."

Obama also signed a presidential memorandum directing White House Office of Science and Technology Policy to develop a strategy "for restoring scientific integrity to government decision making."

"(Promoting) science isn't just about providing resources -- it is also about protecting free and open inquiry," Obama said. "It is about letting scientists like those here today do their jobs, free from manipulation or coercion, and listening to what they tell us, even when it's inconvenient ... ."

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