



Stanford eCorner

Importance of Stem Cell

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1314/Importance-of-Stem-Cell>

Byers talks about how he got involved in the stem cell initiative and its importance to him.



Transcript

Proposition 71 on November ballot, which was passed by 59% affirmative vote by the California voters, and that enables a \$3-billion expenditure over 10 years, \$300 million a year to be spent in California on stem cell training and facilities and research. That never should have had to happen. The fantastic system in the United States is the National Institutes of Health Funding system of extramural research, and that's been going on for over 60 years. And it was brilliantly put together back then because it's a peer review system and the grant goes to the individual, not to the department chair, not to the school. It's to the individual, who deserves to get that because they competed for it and it was their idea. And the key to that whole system is open and free research. But there was a federal government policy put up by the Bush administration to restrict research on embryonic stem cells under federal funding, and that was inhibiting what many of us felt were the set of breakthroughs that we're on the verge of. And here's why stem cells are so important is that we've run the experiment about how much we can do and what we can work on with conventional technologies we have today. So, small-molecule drugs. Protein drugs.

Gene therapy is not working so well. Medical devices are doing well. All these things are doing well, but there's such diseases that those are not going to work on, those tools are not going to solve. They are degenerate diseases, metabolic diseases like diabetes, and so on. And cancer stem cells actually have a big role in cancer. And when you look at where the health care costs are, a lot of them is in intractable diseases that go on for a long time. And we've got to have newer tools to get after that. So that's how we got to stem cells, and we worked our way back to the same 'we've got to do something about it'. California seemed like a good place to do it because it's a large enough economy to finance it and it's got all the institutions of brain power and research labs to be able to carry it out. I can't think of another state that has--there isn't another state that has this capability.

And so we decided to do it. Now, it wasn't just about California because what we wanted is for, if this passed, this initiative to stimulate other people. And so this is going on in Wisconsin and Massachusetts and New Jersey, and of course we know in Europe and Asia, and fine, because this is all to benefit mankind, anyway.