



**Transcript of Governor David A. Paterson's
Remarks at the New York Stem Cell Foundation's Third Annual Gala Dinner
Rockefeller University, New York City
Tuesday, October 14, 2008**

Thank you all for an award that means a lot to me—hopefully representing all those who would become eligible for the use of stem cell research here in this state.

First, I'd like to say a word about David Carmel, who I met in 2004 when he was working on Proposition 71. He said he was going to California to make sure they got stem cell research. So when he got back I asked him if he would help make sure New York got some.

And it was actually January 18, 2005—it was that cold, I remember the date—that we stood in front of City Hall—outside of it for some reason—and we proudly announced that we were going to fight for legislation to create stem cell research in New York. It was so cold, I said to David, “I hope they have stem cell research for frostbite, because I'm sure I've got it by now.” [Laughter]

There are a lot of reasons to promote stem cell research all over this country. Maybe there are 128 million reasons, because, according to the American Heart Association, that's the number of people who can benefit from the possibilities raised by further embryonic stem cell research.

There are a million people in this country with juvenile diabetes. There are 1.3 million people in this country who are blind. There are 4.5 million people suffering from Alzheimer's Disease. There are 150,000 people in this country who are paralyzed from severed spinal cords. There are 2.5 million people in this country suffering from M.S.

These are just some of the candidates for the benefits that stem cell research would bring to their lives if we could find greater and more effective ways to find its use.

And when we look at all the work that's already been done, the opportunities are so promising that we can't think of a greater biotechnical study from the one that derives from this source. And that is why it's so exciting to hear about all of the new findings.

Just last Wednesday, in Germany, the idea emerged that, for purposes of stem cell research, sperm cells may be found to be, in many ways, just as versatile as stem cells that come from embryos. Sperm cells are versatile – I knew that. [Laughter] But now, there's greater versatility than we ever could have forecast.

Looking back to just this past August, the Harvard Stem Cell Institute found that they were able to transform some pancreatic cells into some insulin-producing cells that are destroyed by Type 1 diabetes. So the possibility exists that there might be replacement cells for individuals who suffer from diabetes.

And then, of course, last November, research in the United States and Japan revealed that human skin cells can be transformed into what are known as HPS cells, which, in many ways, mirror the pluripotent aspects of stem cells that derive from embryos.

So when we look at all the possibilities, with really limited research and limited resources, we see that we are really just scratching the surface of the great opportunities, the valuable medical and scientific research that can exist from stem cell research.

Right here in New York, in 2006, I was minding my own business, hoping one day to become Majority Leader of the New York State Senate. And then Eliot Spitzer came to my office and asked me to run for Lieutenant Governor.

I told him I'd think it over. And then I came in the next day, and I said, "You know, there are some areas I'd like to direct. And I'll tell you what they are. But the two that are most important to me would be the study of energy and stem cell research."

He said, "You got it." [Applause] I thought, "Well, now I'd better think of a better excuse, or I might as well accept and run for Lieutenant Governor."

In 2007, in our first budget process, New York—which was 50th of the 50 states in terms of our stem cell efforts—passed legislation establishing \$600 million over the next decade for the study of the use, the activity and the translational nature of stem cells. Only five months later, we were able to send out Requests for Proposals for organizations that might be interested. And on January 7, 2007, we announced \$14.5 million to 25 benefactors that would create the first stem cell research capacity in New York State. [Applause]

By the time we were able to issue that research, New York moved from 50th to fifth in terms of the financial commitment to stem cells, only surpassed by California, Maryland, Illinois and Connecticut. And on May 9, 2008, now as Governor, I issued a call for another \$109 million to be awarded to 35 different groups, now making New York second only to California and bringing us to the point of national leadership in stem cell research. [Applause]

And stick around—I just got here! [Laughter]

We feel that, at this time in our history, it's very clear that we have an immense budget deficit. We have gone back to Albany once already this year to close a deficit that, by law, must always be sovereign in the same year of its existence. We're going to have to go back in November to close another \$1.2 billion of deficit because of the unfortunate downturn in the economy and the fact that New York derives 20 percent of its resources from the Wall Street taxes.

Unfortunately, in the last quarter of a fiscal year—January, February and March—that number balloons to 30 percent of New York's revenues are derived from Wall Street. And with personal bonuses and capital gains taxes being estimated lower and lower, we are in extreme economic hardship in New York.

And yet, there are times when we have to understand that our economic development—the ability to create revenues—are going to be very vital to survival and the prosperity of this state. And medical and scientific research are one of the ways that we can create jobs, create development, and bring revenues back to New York State's economy. [Applause]

But we can't do it alone. We've got to recognize that the federal government—which, in so many ways, has turned its back on the states—has got to come back to the table.

The National Institutes of Health and all of the other organizations have been absent, creating a situation right now where, in the last five months, we've received 400 applications for medical and scientific research under our stem cell plan, some of which are not really eligible, but they've got no other place to go. Our federal government has got to get back into the business of medical and scientific research. [Applause]

And we have got to let medical researchers, doctors and scientists govern their motion within the boundaries of ethics, but not find themselves circumvented by the subjectivity of ideology. We have got to make sure that people have a right to do research, as we have found throughout the centuries when men and women took steps down new roads armed with nothing but their own vision. Often they were thwarted, but what was created was the type of freedom this country was founded on, and the type of medical freedom that was even written about in the Declaration of Independence. [Applause]

And so, even as we look forward to that day when we will partner with our federal government—so that we're not replicating research but expanding it and coordinating it—we will need the New York Stem Cell Foundation to continue.

We will need your great CEO, Susan Solomon, to perform the great work that she has over the past few years. We will need all of you who have supported this great organization, its chair, Roy Geronemus, and all of you who have been supporting this great cause for the last couple of years.

And you should know that originally we were going to have a referendum—a public referendum that would have been on the ballot this November 4. That was the original plan that former Governor Spitzer and I had, to put this issue to public referendum. But when it came time to do it—probably because they feared the outcome—those who opposed stem cell research in this state suddenly were willing to put the money in the budget so that we could go forward.

This is a prelude to what we think will be a national effort that will emulate some of the great research and study that this country has been famous for. And it will bring relief to so many individuals, not only those who are victims of illness, but those who have fought tirelessly and steadfastly to find the type of research and the type of development that will bring great, great honor to this country, to the profession of medicine, and to research and science.

And when that happens, all of you will know that you were in the embryonic stages of that fight—that you were the ones who led us to a great victory, when we start to see the results of all of our research, all of our efforts, and all of our sweat equity.

It is in that vein that I thank you so much, and I am very flattered, not only to be in the spotlight for a moment, but for the warmth that all of you have extended to me, as we have fought the stem cell research battle together, one that has ended in a great victory for all of us New Yorkers.

Thank you very much. [Applause]

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