Stem cell research has shown promise to provide cures for Parkinson’s, diabetes, Alzheimer’s and Lou Gehrig’s disease, but research using stem cells is controversial because it relies on cells harvested from human embryos. Because President Bush “does not sanction further destruction of human embryos that have the potential for life,” he has limited federal support of stem cell research to that which uses only existing stem cell lines. This announcement has essentially halted government-sponsored research. The current policy on stem cell research compromises access to potential cures for debilitating disease and trauma.

Existing stem cell lines are inadequate. Although seventy-eight stem cell lines were initially listed, available lines were reduced to sixty-four and then to twenty-four. Currently only nine embryonic stem cell lines are listed in the NIH registry. Access to these nine lines is extremely difficult and limited.

The current restrictions on federal funding for stem cell research should be reversed, and a larger number of embryos should be made available for research. I support the 225 House members who seek to pass legislation to allow researchers to use discarded or stored embryos from fertility clinics in the United States. In addition, in order to increase access to cures for disease, we need to pass legislation to protect the right to pursue stem cell research for therapeutic purposes. The Human Cloning Ban and Stem Cell Research Protection Act of 2003/S.303 would be a step in the right direction.