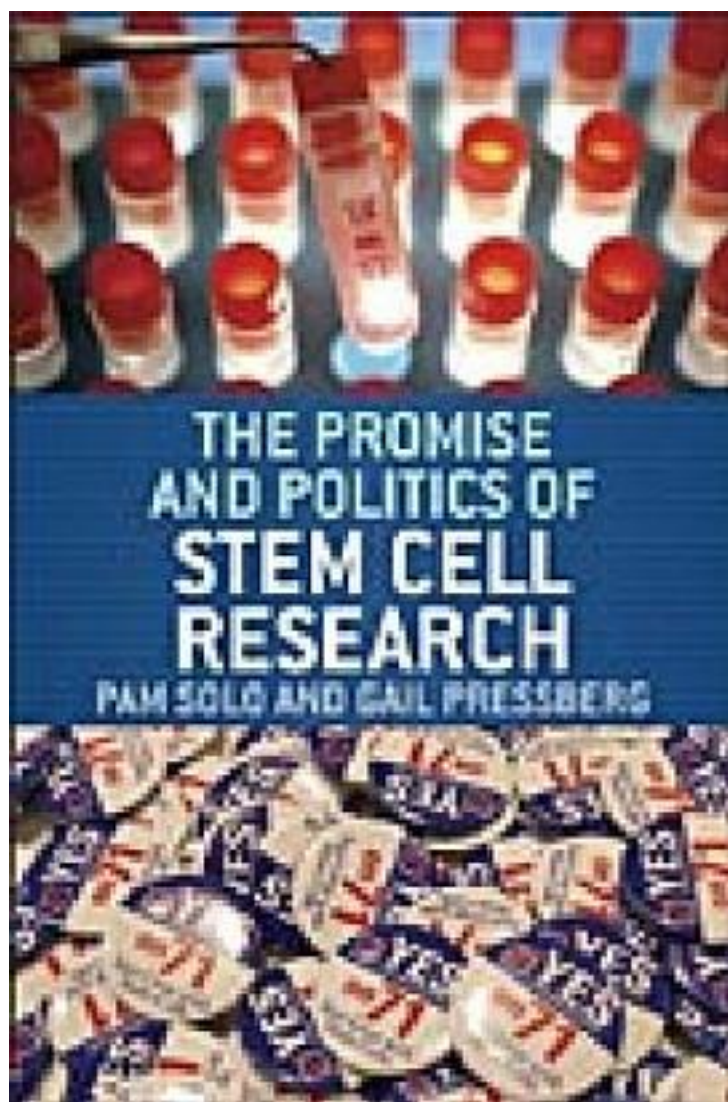


The Promise and Politics of Stem Cell Research



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How did scientific and medical research on something smaller than the period at the end of this sentence come to such prominence in American political life? Embryonic stem cells are a cluster of about 150 cells that form after the joining of an egg and a sperm. The stem cells at the center of the cluster have the potential to become specialized cells that could one day benefit an estimated 100 million Americans. Few areas of public policy have such far-reaching implications. Ever since President George W. Bush limited federal funding for stem cell research, the topic has been not far from the headlines. It reemerged in May 2005 when the president vowed to veto a compromise that 50 Republicans and 188 Democrats in the House of Representatives supported. The compromise, if matched by a similar Senate measure, would have repealed the 2001 limits on funding. Since 238 votes does not rise to the level of the two-thirds needed to override a veto, action at the national level remains stalled. However, states have stepped into the void. California has approved research, and Massachusetts reportedly has the veto-proof majorities to overcome the governor's opposition. New Jersey's governor is leading the way for a tri-state stem cell research initiative with Pennsylvania and Delaware. Wisconsin's governor plans to invest in public and private funding to spur stem cell research in the state. Even Texas Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson is pushing the legislature to allow research. Only six states have reinforced the federal ban, and 60 per cent of Democrats, 60 per cent of independents, and 36 per cent of Republicans support lessening or eliminating the federal restrictions on funding. The issue promises to be one of the most divisive of the 2006 congressional election. In this book, the author explains the politics of the battle over whether or not the United States will take part in the most exciting and promising medical research of our time.

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