

Wilson scientist: Decision opens door for research

by Jennifer Dorsey

Date: March 10, 2009

Wilson resident Zach W. Hall witnessed a bit of history Monday during a White House ceremony at which President Obama lifted Bush administration limits on human embryonic stem cell research.

Hall, a retired neurobiologist who was founding president of the California Institute of Regenerative Medicine, praised not only the action on stem cell research but also Obama's promise to pursue scientific integrity in his administration's decisions.

"I think it's wonderful," Hall said in a phone conversation from Lafayette Park, across from the White House in Washington, D.C., after the ceremony. "Everybody I talked to was enormously heartened by the commitment to scientific inquiry and hearing what scientists have to say and not to distort it or suppress it for ideological end."

As for stem cells, Hall said Obama's action will mean federal money can be used to fund research on many more lines of stem cells than the Bush administration allowed. That could increase the number of scientists working on developing therapies for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, spinal cord injuries and an array of other maladies.

Under previous law, federal money couldn't be used to finance the creation of new stem cell lines.

But as a result of Obama's move, "there will likely be a real partnership," Hall said. "Stem cell lines will continue to be created by state and private foundations. Then those lines can be used by a larger number of people who received federal funding.

"

During the East Room ceremony, Hall got to shake Obama's hand, have his picture taken with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and chat with pioneering scientists, including James A. Thomson, one of the first to extract a stem cell from a human embryo. Also present in the "packed room" were five Nobel Prize-winning scientists.

"It was a very impressive occasion," Hall said.

Coincidental to Obama's announcement, Hall is scheduled to give a free presentation on stem cell research — a basic educational program he calls "Stem Cells 101" — from 7 to 8 p.m. Thursday in the Ordway Auditorium at Teton County Library.

<p>www.jhnewsandguide.com 307-733-2047 © 2009 Jackson Hole News&Guide All Rights Reserved</p>
