

Guest comment

Stem Cell Research Belongs in Bay Area

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California's voters showed extraordinary vision in approving the recent ballot initiative to invest in stem cell research. It is even more remarkable that they did this at a time when the state's budget and finances are under pressure. By thinking long-term, they set California apart from the rest of the nation, where federal restrictions limit stem cell research and its economic and human potential.

The impacts of this decision are already becoming apparent. Before the initiative, top researchers were abandoning the Bay Area and California for friendlier environments such as the United Kingdom. Now, the best stem cell researchers in the nation and the world are turning to California as a Mecca of opportunity. Their presence here promises to cement California's leadership in this important field, benefiting our economy and our citizens.

As the new board that oversees the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine takes charge, one of its first decisions will be where to locate its headquarters. The obvious answer is the Bay Area. Here are a few factors that we hope the Institute's board will consider in its favor.

The Bay Area is:

- The number one region in the nation in National Institutes of Health funding;
- The number one region in venture capital and life sciences investment firms;
- Home to more than 600 biotech companies (over half the nation's total), 820 life science companies, one-quarter of the market capitalization of the U.S. biotech industry and more than two-thirds of the total market capitalization of California's biotech industry;
- Home to the nation's most extensive biotechnology industry service infrastructure.

The Bay Area's status as the birthplace of biotechnology and its continuing success in spawning innovative companies are largely explained by its preeminence in research. The region is home to five leading research universities (five UC campuses and Stanford), five national laboratories, many research institutes, and the research laboratories of a host of world-leading bioscience companies such as Affymetrix, Alza, Applied Biosystems, Bayer, Bio-Rad, Chiron, Genentech and Gilead. The new 43-acre life sciences campus of the University of California at San Francisco is rising at Mission Bay. Biotech parks and incubators dot the region, where startups are

aggressively turning this research into commercial products that benefit our economy and our health.

Significantly, the Bay Area is home to the world's largest concentration of research capacity and companies not only in biotechnology, but also in information technology. It is also home to more nanotechnology companies than anywhere in the world except Germany. IT is a powerful enabler of biotechnology, and the convergence of these disciplines offers unique potential for future scientific breakthroughs.

The headquarters of California's new stem cell institute should be in the Bay Area, not just because the region is the birthplace of biotech, but because of its unique position of national and global leadership in the field. The strength and depth of its research base provide a rich environment in which the opportunities for research, collaboration, and investment will be maximized. While the Institute's offices will be more involved in administration than in research, their presence in an environment charged with entrepreneurship and innovation will reinforce California's status as a global research center, catalyze new interactions, and draw new capital and talent to the region.

Competition within California is heating up. San Diego is already in the game, and while the Bay Area is the Institute's natural home, it's not a foregone conclusion that we will win. To understand this, we should remind ourselves that, for want of effort, more than a decade ago California lost the competition for the national earthquake center to New York.

The Bay Area must step forward now to stake its claim. The region offers an array of attractive options: from San Jose, where biotech is growing, to the East Bay, North Bay and South San Francisco, which are home to industry-leading companies, to San Francisco, where UCSF's Mission Bay complex is emerging as a leading research center. The right decision will benefit not only the region, but also California's taxpayers who have chosen to invest in this important new enterprise.