

Bloomington, Illinois

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## Cosmetic surgery tax scrapped in stem-cell bill

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SPRINGFIELD -- A top state lawmaker said he's scrapping a proposal to fund a state stem cell research center using taxes on elective cosmetic surgery.

House Minority Leader Tom Cross, R-Oswego, said Tuesday the plan would not be approved in the General Assembly the way it's drafted with the tax.

Without the tax, the legislation would still encourage the state's involvement in stem-cell research but provide no funding.

The \$1 billion proposal, spearheaded by Illinois Comptroller Dan Hynes, would have created and fund the Illinois Regenerative Medicine Institute, which would award \$100 million annually in stem cell research grants over the next decade.

"People don't like the tax. A lot of people just have a problem with stem cell research," said Cross. "The combination of the two made it very difficult to pass."

Subsidizing stem cell research in Illinois is a personal issue for Cross. His 11-year-old-daughter Reynolds suffers from diabetes and would stand to benefit from further medical studies.

Many doctors and scientists say studying stem cells, which can develop into the different cell types in the body, can help them understand and possibly cure a range of serious medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, spinal-cord injuries and birth defects.

Representatives from the state's cosmetic surgery community lobbied against the cosmetic surgery tax, arguing it discriminated against middle-class women who make up most of the industry's clientele.

Dr. Jeffrey Poulter, founder of Bloomington's Center for Cosmetic and Laser Surgery, said he received a telephone call from Cross Tuesday informing him that the tax had been removed from the legislation.

Poulter, who previously said that he has no position on stem cell research, credited a letter-writing campaign from plastic surgeons for helping defeat the proposal.

"Illinois really came through to fight something that isn't right," he said.

Supporters could still try to win approval of legislation stating Illinois' support for the embryonic research, but the proposal would not have any funding stream attached to it.

A Hynes spokesman said nothing is off the table.

"We are still pursuing a number of legislative avenues to get stem cell funding," said Alan Henry, who would not elaborate on what those avenues were.