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Stem cell institute puts 2 in same post

Joint appointment for vice chairman

By Terri Somers

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Job sharing came to the state stem cell institute yesterday when its board appointed two people to the post of vice chairman: [San Diego](#) biotechnology veteran Duane Roth and Art Torres, a former state senator and outgoing chairman of the [California Democratic Party](#).

The positions are considered part time. Torres will be paid \$75,000 plus health benefits. Roth declined to take a salary. He has served as a board member of the institute and is employed as head of Connect, a San Diego organization that provides services and guidance to startup technology companies.

Board members, meeting in [Sacramento](#), unanimously approved the appointments, saying that each man has talents that will be needed to help bring new therapies and products to market.

"We face extraordinary financial and medical challenges in driving stem cell therapies through to patients in the short time frame we have set for ourselves," said [Robert Klein](#), chairman of the [California Institute for Regenerative Medicine](#). "I will immediately embrace the talent and dedication of these two vice chairs as we work together to overcome the hurdles that lie before us."

Institute observers think the joint appointment was also motivated by politics and a desire not to irk top state officials. Gov. [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#) nominated Roth, a [Republican](#), to the post. Lt. Gov. [John Garamendi](#), state Treasurer [Bill Lockyer](#) and Controller [John Chiang](#) nominated Torres.

"I think the concept of this is a little bizarre and is all about trying to curry favor with the different political factions in the state," said [John Simpson](#), of the nonprofit Consumer Watchdog in [Santa Monica](#). "It's not clear to me how it will bring any benefit or focus to the organization itself."

Simpson also thinks that Roth should be paid, as does at least one member of the institute's board.

"I believe that everyone should be compensated appropriately and fairly for the work they are going to do," said board member Francisco Prieto, a physician and advocate for [diabetes](#) patients. "In the context of the board and a state agency, to demand something like that excludes participation from anyone who isn't independently wealthy or cannot depend on outside income, which is a substantial portion of the population that needs to be represented here and everywhere else."

Roth said that he does not think he works any more than other board members who do not receive a salary, although they do receive a stipend for attending meetings.

Previously, millionaire biotechnology industry veteran Edward Penhoet held the post of vice chairman and declined to accept a salary. Klein, a real estate executive, also declined to accept a salary for the first few years he served as chairman. This year he said he needed to start receiving a salary, which the board set at \$150,000 for the part-time post.

The duties of Roth and Torres have not been specified, but both said their expertise and connections could help support the institute's mission.

As a board member, Roth has led the institute's effort to develop its policies on intellectual property and loan to the biotechnology industry. As vice chairman, he said he wants to work to involve patient advocates in a dialogue with the U.S. [Food and Drug Administration](#), which decides whether drugs should be approved for

market.

The discussion about drug approvals usually involves regulators and the company making the product, not patients who could benefit from it, Roth said.

"Why not go out there prospectively and let the regulators and reimbursement people know from the patients the value of treating the disease and how much risk they are willing to take (with that treatment?)" Roth asked. "And I think this (institute) is the right group to get patient advocates involved . . . in the way that patients were involved in getting AIDS drugs approved."

Torres, a [colon cancer](#) survivor who has been an active patient advocate, said his experience in the Legislature will help the institute navigate the bond markets through which the state raises money to fund its operations. He also hopes to help the state get federal stimulus money, as well as navigate through the politics of working with state and federal regulators, including the [National Institutes of Health](#) and the FDA, on new health care policies and guidelines.