

# Kowalski: Backing bioscience

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Texas – best known for bar-b-que, ranches, tall hats and . . . curing cancer?

Maybe not just yet, but we could be.

As illnesses such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease lay claim those who are both loved and beloved, it strikes in each of us the need to do more. A need to fight back.

Survivors stand shoulder to shoulder with friends, family, strangers and celebrities running and biking en masse for a cure. Doing their part to make a difference.

Texas as a whole — through public and private partnerships — is also doing its part for these and other advances in the field of biosciences.

Texas is home to approximately 2,994 biotechnology establishments comprised of biomedical research, universities, business and government consortia, and medical manufacturing companies. We boast more than 7 million square feet of lab space and one of the world's largest medical complexes — the Texas Medical Center in Houston, home to 11 educational institutions. About 75,436 Texans are employed in the sector at an average annual salary of nearly \$64,000, according to a March 2006 industry report by the Governor's Office of Economic Development and Tourism.

The report also notes that government support, a highly-trained work force, excellent education and research institutions, a first-rate transportation and logistics infrastructure, and the nation's number one rated business climate all strengthen the state's status as a biotech leader.

The 79th Legislature approved the authorization of the \$200 million Emerging Technology Fund (ETF). This fund provides three critical functions: Invests in young companies who are taking our technology to the next level; Utilizes dollars to match research grants and; Employs a portion of those funds to attract research superiority from other states to Texas.

The ETF has enabled Texas to compete across the country for research talent and has allowed us to leverage our research dollars, further enabling partnerships between the state, academia and private industry to focus greater attention on the research, development and commercialization of these new technologies.

The need to fund the second phase of the ETF is critical, and something this Legislature is looking at.

In fact, almost every state in the country is now specifically targeting bioscience industry development, many strategically targeting specific niches, based on their research and industry strengths.

The price tag and the stakes for bioscience research are high. The cost and time of drug development is both expensive and lengthy. On average, it takes \$868 million, 5,000 to 10,000 drugs tested and 16 years to successfully develop and approve just one drug.

A recently-announced 10-year, \$3 billion statewide initiative in Texas to find cures for cancer could be just the shot in the arm the state's research community needs to stay on the cutting edge, and hopefully find a cure for cancer.

This month, at a conference led by Governor Rick Perry, biotechnology executives, venture capitalists, academicians, policymakers and business leaders discussed how Texas can build on its existing bioscience industry to flourish well into the future.

The consensus: We must have sustained, strong public-private partnerships that will enable Texas build on the foundation already in place. Steps the state can take to ensure ongoing success lie with continued funding of the Emerging Technology Fund, as well as a supportive business, tax and regulatory policies.

Biosciences are expected to grow at a faster rate, in the next decade, than any other industry sector – 13 percent greater than the average growth rate for overall U.S. employment.

A cure for cancer, diabetes, and heart disease can, and will, be found. It's just a matter of where and when.

Kowalski is president and CEO of the Texas Healthcare and Bioscience Institute (THBI), a nonprofit public policy research organization, comprised of biotechnology, medical device, and pharmaceutical companies, academic and private research institutions, as well as companies that provide goods and services to core organizations. For information, visit [www.thbi.com](http://www.thbi.com).