

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 26, 2006

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison, Chairman
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hutchison and Ranking Member Feinstein:

We strongly urge the Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs to demonstrate this nation's commitment to its veterans by providing a much-needed increase in the Fiscal Year 2007 appropriation for the Department of Veterans Affairs' Medical and Prosthetics Research Program.

The Administration's proposed FY07 budget for the direct costs of VA research is \$399 million, a \$13 million cut from the current year's level of \$412 million. The proposed level of direct funds does not keep pace with inflation and will compel VA to cut numerous projects. Therefore, we support a FY07 funding level of \$432 million, in order to cover inflation, sustain current VA research and development commitments, and allow critical new research initiatives to move forward.

If enacted, the proposed cuts to the VA research budget will result in the loss of 96 research projects in valuable areas such as diabetes, cancer, aging, heart disease, and 286 full-time employees (FTE) are projected to lose their jobs. Further, given that participation in VA's top-notch research program is a major factor in recruiting physicians to VA, the research program must be provided the necessary funds to attract and retain quality clinical staff.

Another point to take into account is that the nature of modern warfare and battlefield medicine has resulted in servicemembers coming home with wounds that would have been fatal in previous wars. Many wounded servicemen and women are in need of prosthetic limbs, extensive physical therapy, or have endured traumatic brain injuries. With thousands of military personnel engaged in service overseas, it is vital that Congress invest in research that could have a direct impact on their post-deployment quality of life.

VA research programs have been instrumental in developing innovative and effective methods of treatment since World War II, making landmark contributions to the welfare of veterans and the entirety of the nation. Past VA research projects have resulted in the first successful liver transplant performed in the U.S., development of the cardiac pacemaker, and pioneering the concepts that led to the CT scan. VA research also has played a vital role in treating tuberculosis,

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rehabilitating blind veterans, and more recently, in launching the largest-ever clinical trial of psychotherapy to treat PTSD. For the last 60 years, VA research has been extremely competitive with its private sector counterparts.

Today, VA's research program continues to remain appropriately focused. In 2004, VA research took on leadership of a \$60 million nationwide study – funded by the National Institute on Aging and other partners – to identify brain changes linked with Alzheimer's disease. VA research, in partnership with Brown University and MIT, established a major center of excellence to develop state-of-the-art prosthetics for veteran amputees. In June 2005, *U.S. News & World Report* called VA hospital care "the best around." The important role VA research played in this transformation of the VA medical care system cannot go overlooked; its innovations improved the overall quality and delivery of VA health care for years to come.

Keeping this distinguished record of success in mind, we ask you to further support VA research by ensuring that an appropriate level of funding continues for this program. These funds must be at a level that accounts for inflation, new and daunting challenges, and most importantly, enables VA to remain an attractive option to our best and brightest in medicine. Adequately funding VA's Medical and Prosthetics Research Program is vital to maintaining our commitment to veterans.

Sincerely,



LARRY E. CRAIG



DANIEL K. AKAKA



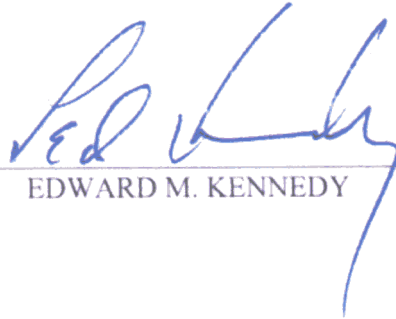
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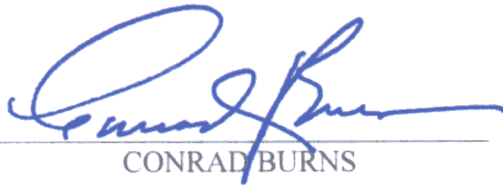
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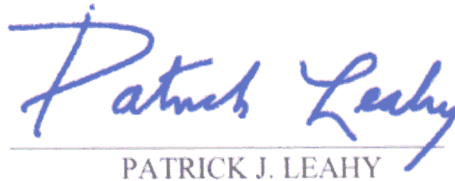
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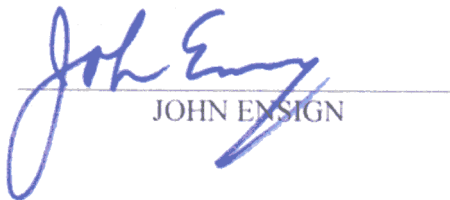



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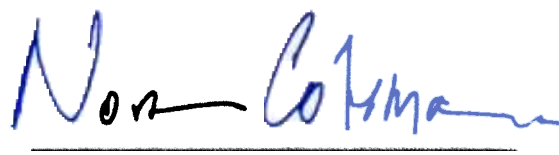

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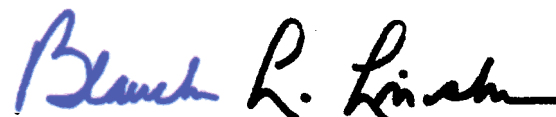
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