April 3, 2006

The Honorable James T. Walsh
Chairman
Subcommittee on Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research coalition (FOVA) writes in regard to the FY 2007 appropriation for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical and Prosthetic Research and Development (R&D) program. FOVA represents more than eighty national academic, medical and scientific societies; voluntary health organizations; patient advocacy groups; and veterans’ service organizations committed to ensuring high quality care for veterans.

As a condition of membership, FOVA members agree not to pursue earmarks or designated amounts or percentages for specific areas of research in the annual appropriation for the VA R&D program. We urge you and your colleagues on the Committee on Appropriations to take a similar stance in regard to FY 2007 funding for VA research. The undersigned members of FOVA oppose earmarks because they jeopardize the following strengths of the VA R&D program:

- **The VA research program is exclusively intramural;** that is, only VA employees holding at least a five-eighths salaried appointment are eligible to receive VA research awards originating from the VA R&D appropriation. This principle provides VA with an extremely powerful tool for recruiting and retaining the highly qualified clinician-investigators who provide quality care to veterans, focus their research on conditions prevalent in the veteran population, and educate future clinicians to care for veterans.

- **VA has well-established and highly refined policies and procedures for peer review and national management of the entire VA research portfolio.** Peer review of proposals ensures that VA’s limited resources support the most meritorious research. Additionally, centralized VA administration provides coordination of VA’s national research priorities, aids in moving new discoveries into clinical practice, and instills confidence in overall oversight of VA research, including human subject protections, while preventing costly duplication of effort and infrastructure.

- **VA research encompasses a wide range of types of research.** Designated amounts for specific areas of research compromise VA’s ability to fund ongoing programs in other areas and force VA to delay or even cancel plans for new initiatives. Biomedical research inflation alone, estimated at 5.5% for FY 2005 and projected at 4.5% for FY 2006, has reduced the purchasing power of the R&D appropriation by $22.7 million and $16.5 million respectively for a total impact of $39.2 million over just two years. In the absence of commensurate increases, VA is unable to sustain important research on diabetes, hepatitis C, heart diseases, stroke and substance abuse, or address emerging needs for more research on post traumatic stress disorder and long-term treatment and rehabilitation of polytraumatic blast injuries. While Congress certainly should provide direction to assist VA in setting its research priorities, earmarked funding exacerbates resource allocation problems.

FOVA urges you to continue preserving the integrity of the VA research program as an intramural program firmly grounded in scientific peer review. These are principles under which it has functioned so successfully and with such positive benefits to veterans and the nation since its inception.

Thank you for considering our views.

The Undersigned Members of FOVA (see next page)
Administrators of Internal Medicine
Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine
Alliance for Aging Research
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Neurology
American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases
American Association of Anatomists
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association of Spinal Cord Injury Nurses
American Association of Spinal Cord Injury Psychologists and Social Workers
American College of Chest Physicians
American College of Clinical Pharmacology
American College of Physicians
American College of Rheumatology
American Dental Education Association
American Federation for Medical Research
American Gastroenterological Association
American Geriatrics Society
American Heart Association
American Hospital Association
American Lung Association
American Military Retirees Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Optometric Association
American Osteopathic Association
American Paraplegia Society
American Physiological Society
American Podiatric Medical Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Society for Bone and Mineral Research
American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics
American Society of Hematology
American Society of Nephrology
American Thoracic Society
Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International
Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology
Association of Academic Health Centers
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Professors of Medicine
Association of Program Directors in Internal Medicine
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
Association of Specialty Professors
Association of VA Chiefs of Medicine
Association of VA Nurse Anesthetists
Blinded Veterans Association
Blue Star Mothers of America
Clerkship Directors in Internal Medicine
Coalition for Health Services Research
Digestive Disease National Coalition
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
Gerontological Society of America
Gold Star Wives
Hepatitis Foundation International
International Foundation for Functional Gastroenterological Disorders
Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International
Legion of Valor of the USA, Inc.
Medical Device Manufacturers Association
Medicine-Pediatrics Program Directors Association
Military Officers Association of America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for the Advancement of Orthotics and Prosthetics
National Association for Uniformed Services
National Association of VA Dermatologists
National Association of VA Physicians and Dentists
National Association of Veterans' Research and Education Foundations
National Mental Health Association
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs
Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Paralyzed Veterans of America Spinal Cord Research Foundation
Partnership Foundation for Optometric Education
Society for Investigative Dermatology
Society for Neuroscience
Society for Women's Health Research
Society of General Internal Medicine
Spinal Cord Research Foundation
The Endocrine Society
United Spinal Association
Veterans Affairs Physician Assistant Association
Veterans of the Vietnam War and the Veterans Coalition