

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 7, 2008

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 615F  
Washington, DC 20201

Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D.  
Director  
National Institutes of Health  
One Center Drive, Room 126  
Bethesda, MD 20892

John E. Niederhuber, MD  
Director, National Cancer Institute  
31 Center Drive, Room 11A48  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Secretary Leavitt and Directors Zerhouni and Niederhuber:

As we near the beginning of Fiscal Year 2009 and you prepare the budget for Fiscal Year 2010, we urge you to increase funding for research involving the development of imaging technologies for prostate cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Currently, men do not have the kind of prostate imaging technologies comparable to state-of-the-art mammography that help saves women from breast cancer every day. It is worth noting that life-saving breakthroughs in screening, diagnosis, and treatment of breast cancer resulted from the development of advanced imaging technologies led by the Federal Government. Our Government should now lead the way so that men will have accurate and affordable prostate cancer screening exams and similar minimally-invasive treatment tools.

Congress has expressed its opinion on the issue of increased support for prostate imaging research twice in recent months. In its Committee Report accompanying the Fiscal Year 2009 Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations bill, the Senate Appropriations Committee wrote that it “encourages the NCI to provide additional funding for research and the development of technologies for prostate cancer detection and treatment, comparable to state-of-the-art mammograms.” (S. Rept. 110-410, page 93.) Similarly, on June 26, the House of Representatives unanimously approved House Resolution 353, which had 101 cosponsors and which stated that “there should be increased support for research and development of advanced imaging technologies for prostate cancer detection and treatment.”

We know that you are aware that prostate cancer has reached epidemic proportions and now strikes at least one in six American men, with African-American men having a 60-percent higher incidence rate than Caucasian men and a mortality rate twice as high. Each year, more than 230,000 American men are diagnosed with prostate cancer, more than 1,500,000 men have biopsies, and around 30,000 men fall prey to this potential killer.

Please bear in mind that a recent National Cancer Institute-funded study demonstrated that the most common available methods of detecting prostate cancer (PSA blood test and physical exams) are not foolproof, causing numerous false alarms and false reassurances. The subject of prostate cancer detection has also been in the news lately because of the new recommended guidelines from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, which sets government policy on preventive medicine and which concluded that "the current evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of prostate cancer screening in men younger than age 75 years." This new development clearly points to the need for imaging technologies to be developed in collaboration between the public and private sectors.

With prostate imaging tools, many men and their families would face less physical, psychological, financial, and emotional trauma and such tools could generate billions of dollars in savings for private and public health care systems. We would also be able to make strides toward resolving a health disparity by improving the quality of care for African-American men and others with histories of prostate cancer in their families.

We urge you to make additional funding for this kind of research available during the upcoming fiscal year and to work with the incoming Administration to make it an explicit high priority in the Department of Health and Human Services Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Request.

Sincerely,

Mike Crayon

Elizabeth Dole

Ron Wyden

Allyson

Jefferson

Sam Brownback

Jim Johnson