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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 6, 2007

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

Dear Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member Hutchison:

We strongly urge the Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs to demonstrate this Nation's commitment to its veterans by providing an increase for Fiscal Year 2008 substantially above last year's funding level for VA's Medical and Prosthetic Research Program.

The President's proposed FY08 budget for VA research is \$411 million, a \$1 million decrease from current funding levels. Adopting the President's VA research budget would result in the direct loss of 193 full-time employees (FTE), impacting VA's ability to effectively respond to the medical needs of veterans. VA requires increased funds just to sustain current research and development program commitments, and to cover inflationary cost increases associated with these commitments. Unfortunately, the President has proposed flatline funding of the VA research budget for a third consecutive year, which would severely impair VA's ability to respond to the changing needs of veterans, young and old.

VA provides the best health care within its means, but research is necessary if we are to enable VA to adapt and improve care. This is of obvious importance as OEF/OIF combat wounded return with complicated injuries such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and as veterans of previous wars face an increasing number of age-related health issues. TBI has become the signature wound of the war in Iraq and we must commit the proper resources to deal with and treat all aspects of the injury.

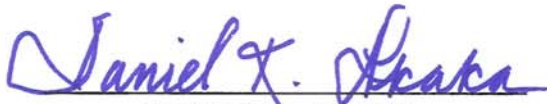
VA health care is the largest health care system in the Nation. In addition to enhancing medical service for veterans, the VA research program's discoveries enhance medical care for all Americans. Past VA research projects have resulted in the first successful liver transplant performed in the U.S., the development of the cardiac pacemaker, as well as theory-building that led to the development of the CT scan. Current research is needed in areas such as colorectal cancer, a common form of cancer of increased concern to aging veterans. Another exciting area of VA research is pharmacogenomics, a branch of genome medicine, which involves customizing drug treatment based on an analysis of the patient's DNA. Research in this area has already shown how variations in a person's DNA can affect their response to medications.

Future VA research can be expected to lead to other groundbreaking innovations, as long as the program has the funding to get the job done.

A robust research program is also essential if VA is to match the needs of servicemembers returning from combat who are suffering injuries that would have been fatal in previous wars. Improvements in battlefield medicine enable the military medical personnel to stabilize injuries, but often the wounded men and women will require prosthetics and extensive rehabilitation to achieve maximum independence. There should be no disagreement that for all these veterans have sacrificed in the line of duty, we should match their commitment to service with a similar commitment to vigorously explore new ways to help them live freer and fuller lives. VA leads the way in making that happen through research, but it is up to Congress to give them the financial support they require.

We thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



DANIEL K. AKAKA  
Chairman



LARRY CRAIG  
Ranking Member