

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 29, 2005

**“FIGHTING ALZHEIMER’S, SAVING TAX
DOLLARS”**

Dear Colleague:

We thought you might find the attached June 16th *Washington Times* editorial, “Fighting Alzheimer’s, Saving Tax Dollars,” of interest. As the editorial states, a modest investment in Alzheimer research that resulted in a breakthrough within the next five years that could delay the onset of Alzheimer’s and slow progression of the disease could save \$51 billion in Medicare costs and \$10 billion in Medicaid costs annually, beginning in 2015.

New research presented last week at the Alzheimer’s Association’s first ever International Conference on Prevention of Dementia demonstrated the progress being made in prevention, early detection, and treatment of Alzheimer’s disease. Studies discussed at the conference found that:

- Data from a study using Positron Emission Tomography (PET) demonstrated pre-symptomatic detection of Alzheimer’s disease in normal elderly subjects. The data suggests that the recognition of future Alzheimer’s disease in a person who is cognitively normal is a realistic goal.
- Researchers at the Mayo Clinic in Florida found that measuring beta amyloid protein in plasma may be a good marker for identifying at-risk individuals three to five years in advance of mild cognitive impairment or Alzheimer’s.
- New studies continue to add to the growing body of scientific evidence that we can maintain a healthy brain and perhaps reduce our risk for Alzheimer’s disease by living a healthy lifestyle – in particular staying socially involved, remaining mentally active, improving diet and exercising.

We are ready to take these advancements in Alzheimer research to the next level. Increasing federal support for Alzheimer research to at least \$1 billion a year would speed discovery of new ways to delay the disabling symptoms and eventually prevent Alzheimer’s disease. That is why we recently introduced HR 1262, the “*Ronald Reagan Alzheimer’s Breakthrough Act of 2005*”. The bill is intended to serve as a living tribute to President Reagan by doubling the funding for Alzheimer research at the National Institutes of Health.

We thank those members of the Task Force who have already signed on as cosponsors of HR 1262 and encourage you to contact Tim Lynagh at 5-3765 or Nicole Encarnacao at 5-2836 if you would like to add your name to the bill.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
Co-Chair


Christopher Smith
Co-Chair

The Washington Times

THURSDAY, JUNE 16, 2005 ★

EDITORIAL

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Fighting Alzheimer's, saving tax dollars

Washington could take a large bite out of the impending Medicare and Medicaid crises — perhaps \$61 billion a year as early as 2015 — with a modest investment today in Alzheimer's research. That's the message the Alzheimer's Association brought to a recent editorial board meeting with The Washington Times, and the association's reckoning looks about right to us. It's time for President Bush and Congress to hike the National Institutes of Health's Alzheimer's research budget.

It's not widely acknowledged, but Alzheimer's will be a key part of the Medicare- and Medicaid-spending crisis in the coming decades. Currently, 34 percent of Medicare spending goes to beneficiaries with Alzheimer's, even though those beneficiaries are only 12.8 percent of the population over age 65. Alzheimer's patients cost Medicare three times as much as other seniors, in fact, because Alzheimer's exacerbates care-provision demands for chronic conditions like diabetes or heart disease. The approaching baby-boomer retirement threatens to expand the numbers of Alzheimer's sufferers dramatically. When the association says that "the future of Medicare and Medicaid depends on getting Alzheimer's disease under control," it's not exaggerating.

Given the current state of research, the association figures that a breakthrough to delay the onset of Alzheimer's and to slow its progression could happen by 2010 with sufficient funding. The most promising avenues

of research include drugs to prevent the buildup of amyloid plaques in the brains of Alzheimer's sufferers, plaques which appear to be related to the development of Alzheimer's. Much of the promising research cannot be patented, however — hence the push for greater NIH funding.

By the group's reckoning, funding the right research areas would cost the federal government approximately another \$320 million a year, quite a small figure relative to overall spending and relative to the likely savings. According to a Lewin Group study the association commissioned, a \$320 million annual hike in federal funding for Alzheimer's research could save \$51 billion in Medicare spending and \$10 billion for Medicaid within five years of a significant breakthrough. The \$320 million would raise current federal Alzheimer's funding by slightly less than half to \$1 billion annually. For comparison's sake, the federal government spends almost three times as much researching HIV/AIDS (\$2.9 billion) and more than five times as much for cancer (\$5.6 billion).

For returns on a tax-dollar investment, it doesn't get much better than this. President Bush and Congress should be hiking funding for the National Institutes of Health's Alzheimer's research programs. It would be a wise investment in the solvency of Medicare. More than this, it would fulfill the government's commitment to push health-care advancements that the private sector cannot.