



NEWS from

U.S. Senator Bob Dole

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
TUESDAY, JUNE 28, 1977

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DOLE REQUESTS GAO EVALUATION OF NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE

Mr. Dole. Mr. President: Except for peace, there is probably nothing the American people want more from their government than a cure for cancer. Here in Congress, we may debate anti-trust legislation, common situs picketing, or welfare reform; but to most Americans, those are only tangential concerns. Rarely do they touch to the quick of our lives. But in one way or another, cancer touches us all. It is hard to find someone who has not lost a friend or loved one to that disease. It strikes at the poor and rich without distinction. It touches the Congress, the White House, the kindergarten, the farm house. And there doesn't seem to be too much we can do about it.

What the Congress can do it has done. We have appropriated increasing sums to the National Cancer Institute for research against this country's most fearful internal enemy. That medical battle is in the hands of scientists, as it should be; and the Senator from Kansas for one, would not presume to second-guess their decisions. It is, therefore, with mixed emotions that I have requested the General Accounting Office to evaluate the effectiveness of the National Cancer Institute, and to review research program selection process so that the Congress can be assured of the effective use of these funds.

Serious questions have recently been raised concerning grants awarded by the Institute to certain organizations to which officials at the Institute have personal ties. During the consideration of the Labor-HEW appropriations bill by the House of Representatives, additional questions were raised about the financing of travel expenses for Institute officials and members of their families. I am certainly not in a position to pass judgment upon either the individuals involved or the Institute grants which are under scrutiny. But while we must avoid prejudging these matters, we can make clear -- both to the Institute and to the taxpayers who fund its vital work -- that the Congress will not abdicate its responsibility to guard carefully the dollars that are our first-line weapons against cancer. That is why I think it appropriate -- and, more than appropriate, necessary -- for the government accounting office to take a close look at certain activities of the Institute, if only to dispel any lingering suspicion concerning them.

The Senator from Kansas has also requested the General Accounting Office to review the methods used by the National Cancer Institute for the selection of cancer research projects.

I believe we should pay attention to the prevention of cancer, and as a member of the Select Committee on Nutrition, I am particularly concerned about the growing body of evidence pointing to relationships between nutrition and cancer. Dr. R. Lee Clark, the President of the American Cancer Society, and Dr. Frank J. Rauscher, Senior Vice President of the Society and former Director of the National Cancer Institute, pointed out recently that "a portion of other cancers may be extrinsically related to the kinds of food we eat. So far, the most likely culprit is the high animal fat diet, which is also implicated in abnormal blood cholesterol and heart attacks". By their estimate, smoking and diet are related to one-half to three-quarters of all killing cancers in the United States.

But we need to know more. Are we creating a future epidemic of cancer by the foods we are feeding our children now? Can we reduce an individual's vulnerability to cancer through better prenatal, neonatal and childhood nutrition? Has nutrition been a factor in the escalating rate of cancer among black men over the last quarter century, an increase which the Director of the National Center for Health Statistics calls "the most startling, most important" rise in cancer mortality? Can alcohol be a carcinogen, either by itself or in conjunction with other chemicals? Should we be as vigilant about its advertising promotion as we have been about tobacco? I think it would be helpful if the Institute were engaged in the kind of research that could direct the Congress in its decisions. What good will it do if, while the Food and Drug Administration enforces a new prohibition by snatching saccharin out of the hands of dieters, the American people persist in other nutritional habits which result in greater susceptibility to cancer?

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Mr. President, I intend my request to GAO to provide assurance that the funds appropriated for use in cancer research are properly directed. I do not want my concern mistaken as censure of the National Cancer Institute. I do not know if the Institute's critics are correct; but they include scientists of the caliber of Nobel prize-winner James D. Watson, who has called our "war on cancer" a "total sham", and Dr. Iwrin Bross, Chief of Health Statistics for Roswell Park Memorial Institute, who has charged that the program is producing more cancer than it is preventing. But even if the Congress is reluctant to take sides in this dispute among learned men and women of science, let us not neglect our responsibility to remind cancer researchers that both we and they are accountable for their federal funds.