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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement

Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

Hearing on “Federally Funded Cancer Research: Coordination and Innovation”

March 29, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling today’s hearing. And thank you to all our witnesses for being here to share your insight with us. Especially you, Ms. Carr. I am so glad that you are here with your family to share the story of your son Chad’s amazing bravery in his battle against cancer.

Today, the single biggest danger we face in fighting cancer and other deadly diseases in this country is President Trump’s budget.

Earlier this month, President Trump proposed a budget that would decimate the budget of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). It would slash funding next year by nearly \$6 billion—or about a fifth of NIH’s budget. His proposal gives little explanation for targeting NIH for this massive cut, which can only be described as heartless.

After he issued his budget, the White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, tried to explain that these cuts were not really cuts at all. He was asked about the NIH budget, and he argued that only in Washington does less funding mean there was a cut. Here is what he said:

There is this assumption in Washington, Jonathan, that if you get less money, it’s a cut. And I think that the reality is that in a lot of these there’s efficiencies, duplicity [sic], ways to spend money better. And I think if you’re wasting a lot of money, that’s not a true dollar spent.

Ms. Carr, I know that in your written testimony for today, you say President Trump’s budget cut “hits me right in the gut.” Well, you are not alone. There is bipartisan outrage over his proposal to slash NIH funding. On March 17, Republican Congressman Tom Cole said this:

I don’t favor cutting NIH or Centers for Disease Control. You’re much more likely to die in a pandemic than a terrorist attack, and so that’s part of the defense of the country as well.

Ms. Carr, in your testimony, which I hope every Member of this Committee reads, you point out that we need to devote more funding to this critical research—not less. And we need to make sure it is directed to cases like your son’s, which have little or no federal funding devoted to them today.

Mr. Spicer did not make his “less funding is not a cut” argument when President Trump proposed increasing the Pentagon budget by \$52 billion next year alone. Our Committee had a hearing last week on how the Defense Department is wasting tens of billions of dollars. But for some reason, cancer research is decimated rather than trimming the bloated defense budget.

I believe there are few investments more significant than the investments we make in biomedical research. The work of NIH is transformational, with the power to turn ideas into cures. Our investments increase our understanding, and they reduce the burden of disease around the world.

This research is also an incredible economic engine, generating activity in every state in the country. NIH grants support high-quality research and high-quality jobs that help us grow our science and technology workforce.

Most importantly of all, this research generates hope. I hear it nearly every day from constituents who come to my office. They share their stories. Sometimes they speak for themselves, and sometimes they speak for those who are no longer with us. The one thing that binds us all together is our hope for tomorrow.

I share their hope. I believe in the promise that biomedical research holds. But we are at a crossroads. Congress must reject the devastating cuts to NIH proposed by President Trump.

I have the honor of representing some of the most esteemed health centers in the country, if not the world. When I consider the magnitude of these proposed reductions, I think of all the potential that could be lost. I think of all the breakthroughs that could go unfunded and the researchers who could take their talents overseas.

I also think of families like the Carrs who have lost children to rare diseases. Families like theirs have turned their pain into purpose, raising money and awareness in the hope of saving someone else the grief they experience.

But they cannot do it alone. They need a strong partner. Now is the time to recommit ourselves to leadership with investments that reflect our priorities of innovation and health promotion. Our budget cannot abandon those values.

I look forward to hearing more about the innovative work of our panelists, and I call on all of my colleagues to continue supporting these and other programs with strong federal investments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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