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**Op-Ed Writers Say Iraq War Taking Away Cancer Funding**

Scott Nance

Apr. 18, 2008 ([On The Hill](#) delivered by Newstex) -- Many scientists believe that "the cost of the Iraq war is largely responsible for a drop in real dollars for cancer research, and private organizations, though critical, are a pale substitute for the power of the federal government," according to a Clinton-era White House aide and a cancer lab director. Discoveries are being lost due to "the high funding bar," they say.

Ex-White house aide Robert Weiner and Dr. Patricia Berg, director of a George Washington University Medical Center breast cancer lab, published a commentary in today's San Diego Union Tribune. Titled "TOO FEW FUNDS TO FIGHT CANCER," the authors say the article is based on their attendance at the annual national meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), attended by 17,000 cancer researchers from throughout the U.S. and the world, according to a statement released from Weiner's office.

Weiner and Berg say that "the underlying buzz all around the San Diego meeting was, Where is the Federal Government?"

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has lost 2 percent of its budget to inflation in real dollars every year for the last seven years, a 14 percent decline, according to the Weiner statement. The National Cancer Institute (part of NIH) now funds fewer than 10 percent of requested research projects, down from 25 percent a decade ago, the Weiner statement adds.

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Those decreases are in contrast to big increases the federal government approved to the NIH budgets in the Clinton and early Bush years.

According to his statement, Weiner asked Ellen Sigal, chairwoman of Friends of Cancer Research in Arlington, Va., and the chair of a forum at AACR on alternative funding mechanisms, why there is the drop in federal funds. She responded, "We have a deficit and a war." Weiner argues, "If funding potential disease cures is the price of Iraq, it is no wonder that 70% of Americans oppose the war in the scheme of priorities."

"Cancer scientists share the blame," Weiner and Berg assert. When Weiner asked why the "professional consensus" at NCI is only requesting a \$1 billion increase for 2009, AACR expert panelists gave two reasons: "complacency" and a feeling of "the limits of entitlement. Scientists should show the same vision in their funding requests from government as they do in their search for disease cures," the authors argue. "Wouldn't we rather see additional costs for visionary medical cures for cancer than a war causing cancer to our economy?"

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