

# PRESIDENT NIXON'S ROLE IN THE INITIATION OF THE NATIONAL CANCER PROGRAM

Address by John W. Yarbro, M.D., Ph.D., Upon Presenting to Former President Richard Nixon the Award for Service to Cancer Patients of the Association of Community Cancer Centers

**T**his year we begin celebration of three events, central in importance to the health of America. These celebrations will last for over a year.

One hundred and fifty years ago this year, the National Library of Medicine received its first appropriation. One hundred fifty dollars approved under the frugal administration of President Andrew Jackson. Thus began the library of the first Surgeon General of the United States,

Dr. Joseph Lovell. From that modest beginning, this library has grown to the largest medical collection in the world with a budget of \$56 million dollars a year. . . presently headed, I am proud to say, by a former colleague of mine from the University of Missouri, Dr. Donald Lindberg.

It will be 50 years next April, since Senator Homer Bone of Washington state and a young congressman, also from Washington, Warren G. Magnuson, introduced legislation into the Senate and House (S 2067 and HR 6100) that was signed into law as The National Cancer Institute Act (PL 244) August 5, 1937, by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This Act authorized \$700,000 for cancer research that year.

Fifteen years ago, the Senate approved establishment of the National Panel of Consultants on the Conquest of Cancer, at the request of Senator Ralph W. Yarborough of Texas. This led to the passage of PL 92-218—The National Cancer Act—which was signed into law December 23, 1971, by President Richard Nixon, whom we honor today with the Association of Community Cancer Centers' annual award for service to cancer patients.

Three anniversaries. . . the 150th of the National Library of Medicine, the 50th for the National Cancer Institute Act, and the 15th for the National Cancer Act. . . and three presidents. . . Andrew Jackson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Richard Nixon.

No great event is ever the work of one man or one woman alone, however much any movement needs a leader. Later this year, in December, others involved in making the National Cancer Act a reality will be honored by The National Coalition for Cancer Research. Then the celebration will continue for the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the National Cancer Institute.



**ACCC Immediate Past President John W. Yarbro, M.D., Ph.D., makes a point during the award presentation to President Nixon.**

Each of these acts was a commitment to the future of America's health. . . each of different magnitude. The explosion in funding and resources provided by the National Cancer Act is perhaps best illustrated when I tell you that 80% of all of the dollars spent on cancer research have been spent since its passage in 1971. . . so, it is fitting that we begin this series of celebrations by honoring the man whose support made that Act possible. All of you are aware of the enormous importance of the National Cancer Act—the research progress made—the lives saved—I will not detail that now. But before I present this award, I want to tell just one story:

Fifteen years ago, I was at the Fox Chase Cancer Center of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. I was asked to come down to Washington to testify before a Congressional Committee in support of the National Cancer Act. It's hard to get a Congressman's attention and I wanted an opening line that would make those fellows sit up and listen to what I had to say. Everyone had told them that one person in four would get cancer and that nearly one million Americans get cancer every year. They had been told that almost a half million Americans die of cancer each year. But I wanted to make the point more forcefully

and I couldn't figure out how to do it. The night before I was to talk, I suddenly realized that if one in four Americans would get cancer and if there were 200 million people living in America, this meant that out there—somewhere—were 50 million Americans who were destined to get cancer!

I had my opening line—“*Mr. Chairman, it is my duty to speak to you this morning on a subject of major consequences to the 50 million Americans, now alive, who will develop cancer.*” . . . They listened. . .

Now I want to make one simple point: In 1971, when I said that, the cure rate for cancer was only 42%. This meant that with 1971 technology, we would have been able to cure only 21 million of the more than 50 million destined to get cancer.

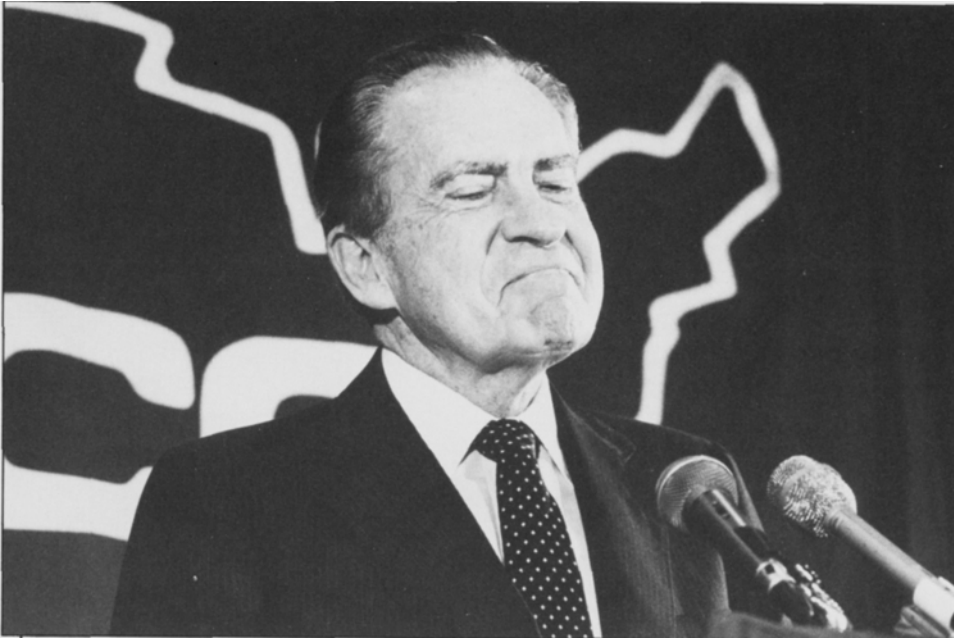
Eight years after passage of the National Cancer Act, the cure rate had increased to 49%. That was twice the progress of the preceding decade!

That improved technology will move 4 million people from the ‘dead’ column to the ‘cured’ column. We have reason to believe the cure rate is now over 50%. This means that there are, out there, somewhere, over 4 million Americans destined to get cancer who will be cured of that cancer because of the new technology developed so far under the National Cancer Act. . . four to five million. . . and they don't even know it.

Without the support of the man we honor today, that legislation would not have been possible. Richard Nixon is widely recognized for his support of the fight against cancer.

Last month, Daniel Greenberg—a tough, outspoken, Washington reporter who is never easy on the establishment—said of Richard Nixon's dedication to

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**President Nixon accepts a standing ovation from the Association's membership on his award for the signing of the National Cancer Act in 1971.**

technology developed under the National Cancer Act of 1971. The day is near when basic cancer research will achieve a dramatic breakthrough.

When I visited China in 1972, Marshall Ye, a revered eighty-year-old Chinese leader who had accompanied Mao and Chou En-lai on the Long March escorted me to the Great Wall. In the two hours we were in the car together, his primary interest was not in the new U.S./Chinese strategic relationship but the progress we were making in cancer research under the initiative which I had announced in 1971. He observed that the Chinese smoked too much and that lung cancer was sharply increasing. I told him that I hoped one of the results of our new relationship would be a program of cooperation between Chinese and American doctors and scientists in cancer and other medical research.

Four years later when I visited China again, I think I may have discovered one of the reasons for his interest in our cancer program. Premier Chou En-lai, my host, was too ill to see me. He died of cancer a few weeks later.

Today the United States has political differences with several nations. Our differences with the Soviet Union are particularly great. Some will never be settled due to the fact that our interests and theirs are diametrically opposed. But we have one common interest which should override all political differences. The United States and the Soviet Union should be allies in the war against disease and particularly against cancer, where Soviet death rates are sharply up.

I believe American scientists and doctors are the best in the world. We win more Nobel Prizes than any other country. But we have no monopoly on wisdom. Great medical discoveries are not limited by national boundaries. They should never be limited by national differences. We are waging the war against cancer not just for ourselves alone but for all mankind.

Thirteen years from now we will be celebrating the beginning of a new year, the beginning of a new century, and the beginning of a new millennium. It is a day which comes only once in a thousand years. The twentieth century has been the bloodiest century in history. One hundred forty million people were killed in wars in this century. That is more than all the people killed in wars in all of recorded history before this century began.

But there have been some great positive developments as well in the twentieth century. We have seen the automobile replace the horse. We have learned to fly. We have gone to the moon. We have split the atom. We have developed radio, motion pictures, and television. We have ushered in the age of computers. On the health front, we have found cures for polio, tuberculosis, and other dread diseases.

Before this century ends, the conquest of cancer could be our greatest victory. ■

#### **YARBRO** *Continued*

cancer research *"the record shows that he was the first and last President to give cancer research personal attention and budgetary backing."*

Benno Schmidt, New York financier, philanthropist, and the first chairman of the President's Cancer Panel said *"Nixon told me 'I want it to work' and no President has ever told anybody that since."*

Frank Rauscher, pioneer in the cancer virus research program that ultimately led to the discovery of cancer genes, Director of the National Cancer Institute under President Nixon, and now Vice-President of the American Cancer Society, said that the President was so interested in the program that he met with Rauscher almost every month. *"He asked if we had enough resources. He was interested in survival statistics and the availability of treatment for children. He wanted to know if Congressmen were pressuring for cancer centers in their districts. We could have asked for more. But we were growing. We were getting as much as we could handle."* I don't know what Dick told you about the Congressmen, Mr. President, but I left the University of Pennsylvania to come to Washington to be Director of the Cancer Centers Program and I can assure you that the Congressmen were exerting pressure... some of it subtle... and some of it not so subtle.

President Nixon, in his 1971 State of the Union message which urged that we cut back in most expenditures, called for *"an extra \$100 million to launch an intensive campaign to find a cure for cancer."* He said, *"Let us make a total national commitment."* That commitment was made... and that commitment paid off.

And so... on behalf of the Association of Community Cancer Centers and the thousands of practicing oncologists all across the land... and on behalf of over 50 million Americans now alive who will develop cancer in their lifetimes, and most especially on behalf of at least 4 million of them who will be cured because of the research that your signing the National Cancer Act made possible, I am honored to present to you, President Richard Nixon, on the 15th anniversary of the National Cancer Act, our Association's award for service to cancer patients. ■