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THE WAR AGAINST CANCER

Address by Former President Richard Nixon Upon Accepting the Award for Service to Cancer Patients of the Association of Community Cancer Centers

In expressing my appreciation for this award, may I in turn thank the members of this organization for what you have contributed to the cause of cancer prevention and treatment. The 300 community cancer centers you represent manage twenty-five percent of all cancer cases in the United States. You are the front line troops in the war against cancer. All Americans are in your debt.

When I signed The National Cancer Act two days before Christmas in 1971, I said: *"I hope in the years ahead we will look back on this action today as the most significant action taken during this Administration."*

How could I say that—particularly in view of what had happened just in the year 1971? On July 15 I had announced my trip to China, which led to an historic new relationship between China and the United States. In October, I had announced my trip to Moscow, which led to the first Soviet-U.S. nuclear arms limitation agreements. By the end of that year, we had reduced our forces and casualties in Vietnam by seventy-five percent. All of these actions were major steps toward a more peaceful world. How could a new cancer initiative compare with them in importance?

Let me answer that question on two levels—strategic and personal.

From a strategic standpoint, we must recognize that more Americans die each year from cancer than were killed in action in all four years of World War II.

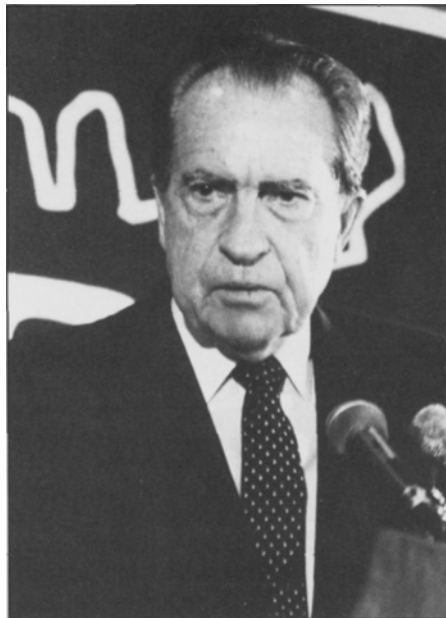
From a personal standpoint, there were several reasons for my deep commitment to the cause of finding a cure for cancer.

When Mrs. Nixon was only twelve years old her mother died of cancer.

When I was in high school, one of my favorite aunts, to whom I was deeply attached, died of cancer.

There were three incidents while I was Vice President that seared my memory. Early in 1953 I spoke to the President's Business Advisory Council in Hot Springs, Virginia. Senator Robert Taft preceded me on the program. He made some uncharacteristically rude remarks about businessmen in general which shocked those in the audience, most of whom were his friends. When he completed his remarks, he abruptly got up and left the room pushing his wife,

Martha, ahead of him in her wheelchair. I



President Nixon describes his personal experiences with cancer and praises U.S. researchers and physicians for their role in reducing cancer mortality.

noticed that he limped as he walked. I turned to the chairman and said, *"Ignore his comments. I sense that he just isn't feeling well."* Two months later he died of cancer.

I shall never forget the last time I saw John Foster Dulles on May 20, 1959. I often visited him at Walter Reed Hospital where he was terminally ill with cancer. As the nurse wheeled him into the reception room that day, I noted that he was painfully thin. His voice was weaker than usual. But his superb mind had become even sharper as his physical condition deteriorated.

When I visited him, he never talked about his physical problems. He always preferred to discuss the great foreign policy issues to which he had devoted his life. On this occasion, I asked him what advice he had for me for my meeting with Khrushchev, which was to take place the

following month. I told him that some Soviet experts in the media were insisting that my major goal should be to convince Khrushchev that the United States did not threaten him and that we were sincerely for peace. He disagreed. He said, *"Khrushchev does not need to be convinced of our good intentions. He knows we don't threaten him. He understands us. What he needs to know is that we understand him. Rather than trying to convince him that we are for peace, you should try to convince him that he cannot win a war."* It was the best advice I ever received on Soviet-American relations. Four days later he died.

My most vivid recollection is of a day that I was presiding over the Senate. The regular chaplain was out of town and a visiting chaplain gave the invocation. I always listened to the invocation because more often than not it was the best speech of the day—which may be damning it with faint praise. Afterwards, I shook hands with him and he asked me if I could give him an autograph for his daughter who, as I recall, was about eight years old, the same age as my daughter Julie. He told me she was an only child. His wife and he had always wanted children, and when this little girl was born after fifteen years of marriage he said she was like a gift from heaven. I asked where she went to school. He told me that she was no longer able to go to school; she was in the National Health Institute being treated for leukemia. That afternoon Gina Lollobrigida made a courtesy call on me in my Capitol office and presented me with two beautiful Italian walking dolls for my two daughters, Tricia and Julie. That night I told them about the dolls and the little girl in the hospital. They wanted to keep the dolls, but they urged me to give them to her.

The next day at the National Health Institute, I had one of the most rewarding

conversations of my life with the little girl and her roommate, who was also suffering from leukemia. I went there to cheer them up. Their liveliness and irrepressible spirit cheered me up.

A few months later, I learned that the little girl had died holding the Italian doll in her arms.

What progress has been made in the fifteen years since the national cancer initiative? The federal budget for cancer programs has increased from \$230 million in 1971 to \$1.25 billion in 1985. Contributions to the American Cancer Society have increased from \$70 million in 1971 to \$240 million in 1985. The number of medical oncologists—cancer specialists—has increased from 100 in 1970 to over 2,800 in 1980. There were only three comprehensive cancer centers in the United States in 1971; there are over 20 today.

But what are the results of all of this additional money and effort? First, the bad news: We have learned that unlike polio or tuberculosis, there is no one cure for cancer. There are many different kinds of cancer. Cancer is a Hydra-headed monster. The death rate from cancer is still increasing. Four hundred seventy-two thousand people will die from cancer this year—an increase of ten thousand over last year.

But now for the good news: While there is no one cure for cancer, cures have been found for some types of cancer. In 1971, there were cures for only two types of cancer in cases where it had spread from the point of origin. Today, there are cures for twelve types of cancer which have spread from the point of origin. While the death rate from cancer has moderately increased, the survival rate of those diagnosed and treated for cancer has increased dramatically.

Most striking is that the survival rate for children with cancer has increased from ten percent in 1970 to over fifty percent in 1985. Among all cancer patients in 1970, only forty percent could hope to survive for five years or more after treatment. Today, over fifty percent will survive. Here are some examples comparing 1970 and 1983. The survival rate for colon cancer has increased from forty-nine percent to fifty-three percent, leukemia from twenty-two percent to forty percent, breast cancer from sixty-eight percent to seventy-five percent, prostate from sixty-three percent to seventy-two percent, and Hodgkin's disease from sixty-seven percent to seventy-three percent.

But statistics are too cold and impersonal to make the point. Let me put it in personal terms. Two years ago I was

deeply distressed to learn that my brother Don, who is two years younger than I, had a very severe case of Hodgkin's disease. He has had a very rough time over the past two years going through chemotherapy and other treatment. I saw him when I was in California three weeks ago. He looked thin and weak but his spirit was strong. He told me his doctor had told him that if he had had only the treatment available fifteen years ago, he would not be alive today.

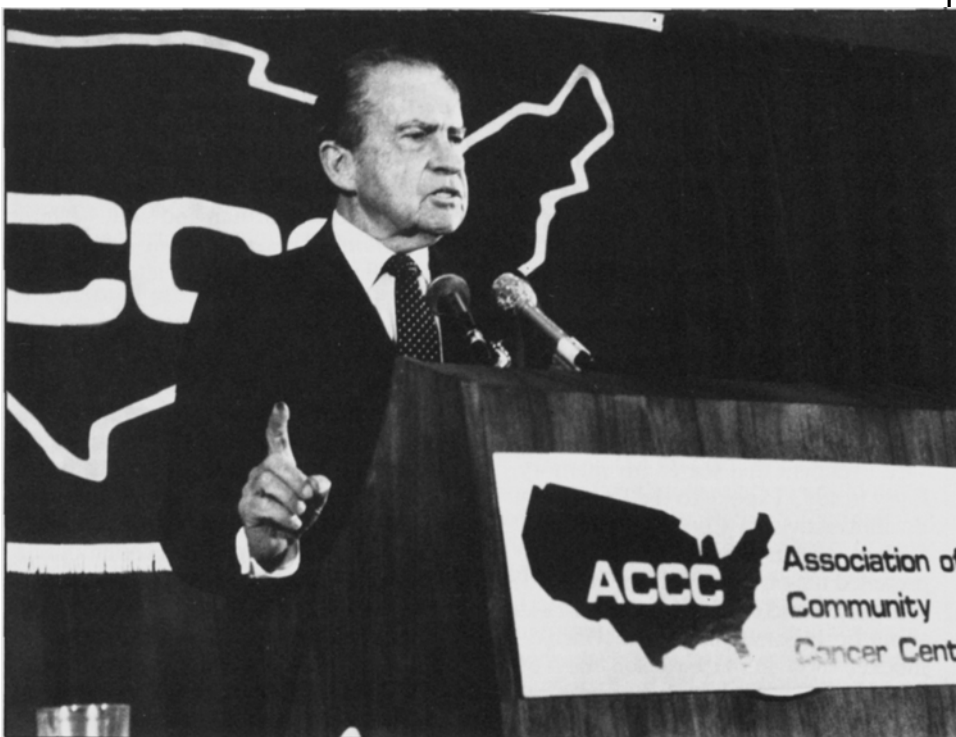
One of the greatest advances in the past fifteen years is in cancer prevention by early diagnosis and treatment. I recall a meeting of the National Security Council early in 1953. Seated at Eisenhower's right was General Hoyt Vandenberg, the Air Force Chief of Staff. He was one of the most handsome men in the service and a legendary World War II hero. A great future lay before him. I noticed that he looked thin and drawn as he briefed the President and members of the Security Council on our Air Force capabilities. A few months after that meeting, he died of cancer of the prostate.

Eisenhower's military aid, General Jerry Persons, was one of Vandenberg's closest friends. He was deeply shocked because he felt his death was so unnecessary. Vandenberg had not found the time during his wartime service to have his routine annual physicals which would have disclosed the problem and cured it with a simple operation.

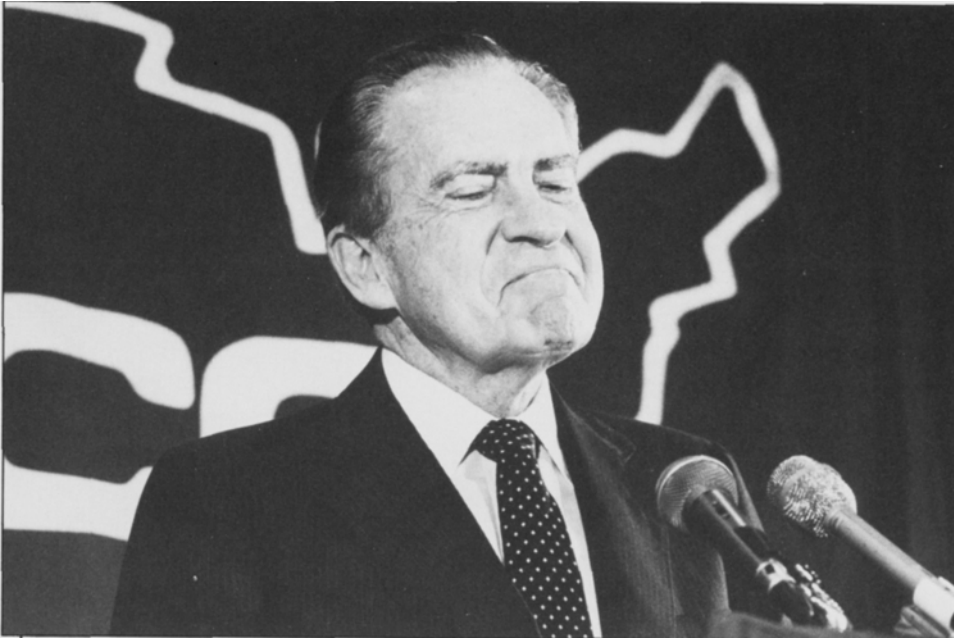
In this audience today is my former secretary, Rose Mary Woods. Just before Christmas she was not feeling well. Her doctor insisted on a complete physical. She was shocked when he diagnosed lung cancer—particularly because she had never smoked in her life. She has had a difficult time after her operation, but the prognosis is good. Had the doctor not insisted on the examination and operation, she might not be here today.

Finally, there have been some encouraging developments in basic research. Scientists have long believed that cancer was caused by damage to certain genes. Since the passage of the National Cancer Act, investigators at several laboratories across the United States have identified for the first time what are called oncogenes. They have begun to learn how genes are damaged by certain chemicals and how cancer genes are activated. They have not yet found a cure, but the first step in finding a cure is to find the cause and they have made significant progress in that area.

We had high hopes when we launched this initiative fifteen years ago that we would find a complete cure for cancer. We have been disappointed in that respect, but we have made significant progress on prevention and treatment. As Doctor Yarbrow has pointed out in his introductory remarks, over four million Americans who are destined to get cancer will be cured because of the new



President Nixon emphasizes that cancer research and treatment should remain a national and international priority.



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. ■