

**Chairman Roy Blunt Opening Statement
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies**

Hearing Titled: "Saving Lives Through Medical Research"

March 8, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. I want to thank our witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today.

In the next few years, as we continue to confront difficult spending choices, we must continue to firmly establish our federal commitment to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Since its founding, the NIH has funded research to raise life expectancy, lower health care costs, and improve the quality of life for all Americans. In the eighty years since Congress established the National Cancer Institute, crude treatments and grim prognoses have been replaced by individualized treatments and sophisticated diagnostics. Since the 1940s, the rate of cardiovascular disease deaths has dropped 60 percent thanks to effective treatments developed by NIH-funded research. And these great strides are just two examples of thousands of medical breakthroughs. In just the past year, NIH funded the development of an artificial pancreas that would be a life-changing advance for many people with type 1 diabetes; discovered biomarkers that were unique to two different prostate cancer stages; and decoded the structure of the Zika virus.

We should remember that this progress did not occur on its own. It happened because generations of researchers, funded largely by the U.S. government through the NIH, tirelessly worked to discover the science that led to these treatments and cures. Federal funding was an essential component of the progress that has advanced the understanding of disease, raised life expectancy, and improved the quality of life for patients and their families.

Last year, for the first time in over a decade, the Labor/HHS Appropriations bill significantly increased funding for the NIH. This \$2 billion increase allowed the NIH to fund 1,147 more grants nationwide. Funding for NIH research in my home state of Missouri has increased \$37.4 million or 8 percent. Consistent, sustained increases in funding are critical for biomedical researchers as they undertake the complex, multi-year studies necessary to pursue new treatments and cures. But the way to begin a pattern is in the second year, and, with my thanks to Senator Murray for her support, this fiscal year we were able not only to pass the first bipartisan Labor/HHS bill out of Committee in seven years, but also to increase NIH funding by another \$2 billion.

The fiscal year 2016 funding increase cannot and should not be a one hit wonder. We should not point to that and believe we have accomplished our goal. We must remain focused on establishing a pattern of responsible investment through the appropriations process. We do not know the scientific advances that will be made in the next ten years, but we do know that if we keep investing in NIH, they will keep making life-saving breakthroughs. That is why funding NIH, every year, through the appropriations process, provides the opportunity to capitalize on

and enhance the discoveries made by the research community and ensure we are funding the right programs with the most scientific promise.

I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses who understand, first hand, the importance of NIH funding and the impact this funding has on the lives of every American.

Thank you.

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