We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Lance Corporal Leusink for his sacrifice. I am greatly saddened by his passing but deeply proud and grateful for what he gave for America. His loss remains tragic but he died a true patriot.

VA RESEARCH

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, today I rise to highlight the wonderful work being conducted by VA's Medical and Prosthetic Research Program. VA research programs continue to lead in developing innovative and effective methods of treatment that have been its trademark since World War II. From its inception, the VA research program has made landmark contributions to the welfare of veterans and the entirety of the Nation.

Past VA research projects have resulted in the first successful liver transplant performed in the United States, development of the cardiac pacemaker, and pioneered the technologies that led to the CT and MRI scans. VA research also played a vital role in treating tuberculosis, rehabilitating blind veterans, and more recently, launched the largest ever clinical trial of psychotherapy to treat PTSD.

In 2004, VA research took on leadership of a $60 million nation wide study—funded by the National Institute on Aging and other partners—to identify brain changes linked with Alzheimer's disease. VA research also established a major center of excellence, in partnership with Brown University and MIT, to develop state-of-the-art prosthetics for veteran amputees. For the last 60 years, VA research has been extremely competitive with its private sector counterparts.

I would like to recognize a few research projects that can potentially benefit veterans living in remote and rural areas across the country, including veterans living in my home State of Hawaii, where the geography creates challenges in accessing care. One study, Telemedicine and Anger Management Groups for PTSD Veterans in the Hawaiian Islands, builds on preliminary research supporting the use of technology for improving access to mental health care for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. The study focuses on the effectiveness of conducting anger management group therapy treatment through video-teleconferencing.

I also applaud the Pacific Islands Division of the National Center for PTSD in Honolulu. Their efforts have improved access to PTSD treatment in remote areas and contributed to the knowledge and understanding of cultural factors related to PTSD. I commend the Pacific Islands Division for its collaboration with the Department of Defense. I hope that VA and DOD continue to work together on future research projects aimed at providing better treatment for servicemembers and veterans alike.

In 2004, VA Research Currents, a publication that highlights the excellent work of the VA research community, reported on a study which found that men who walked less than a quarter of a mile each day were, on average, nearly twice as likely to develop dementia compared to those that walked more than 2 miles a day.

This research project was led by Robert D. Abbott, Ph.D, of the University of Virginia; senior author Helen Petrovitch, M.D.; and coauthor G. Webster Ross, M.D., of the Honolulu VA Medical Center. According to the researchers, the findings suggest that promotion of an active lifestyle could promote better health later on in life.

The last study I would like to discuss examines the correlation between drinking coffee and preventing Parkinson's disease. It has been said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. In this case, VA researchers and their colleagues found that consuming at least 28 ounces of coffee can lower the risk of Parkinson's disease. Lead author G. Webster Ross, M.D., along with colleagues from the Kuakini Medical Center, used participant dietary nutritional data from the Honolulu Heart Program for their findings. The study helped scientists better understand the mechanisms of Parkinson's disease and found a strong correlation between coffee drinkers and low rates of Parkinson's disease. Dr. Ross did note, however, that it was too early to recommend drinking coffee to prevent Parkinson's disease.

To ensure that VA can continue these studies and tremendous successes, VA research must be given the funds to do the job. VA research funding must be at a level that takes into account not only inflation but new challenges as well. Most importantly, adequately funding VA research helps to ensure that VA remains an attractive option to our best and brightest in medicine. Chairman CRAIG and I, along with 60 of our colleagues, have recommended $432 million in funding for VA research next year, notwithstanding that this number is just to maintain current services and avoid any personnel or project cuts.

Just last week, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing on the VA research program, hearing firsthand the challenges researchers face in not only finding new methods of treatment but in funding, too. I came away from the hearing with a better understanding of the VA research program's needs, as well as the challenges we in Congress can help them overcome.

That is why I, along with 61 of my colleagues, have recommended an addition to the VA research budget and not a decrease. Less funding for VA research at this point in time will have negative consequences down the road, when VA inherits the servicemen and women currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Let us not fail in our responsibilities of providing adequate funding so VA's Medical and Prosthetic Research Program can continue to innovate and save lives.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

ANNIVERSARY PROCLAMATION FOR SISTERS OF MERCY IN ST. LOUIS

● Mr. BOND. Mr. President, June 27, 2006 marks the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy in St. Louis, MO. Founded in Dublin, Ireland, in 1831 by Mother Catherine McAuley, the Sisters have dedicated themselves to serving the sick, poor, and uneducated, particularly women and children.

In 1856, at the request of St. Louis Archbishop Peter J. Kenrick, six Sisters of Mercy journeyed by train and boat from New York to St. Louis, arriving on June 27, 1856, to open St. Francis Xavier Parish School. During their first year in St. Louis, in addition to opening this new school, the Sisters visited the sick, poor, and jailed; started a Sunday school program for African-American women and girls; began an industrial school for children with one parent; and opened an orphanage. Despite many challenges including lack of money, food and clothing, the Sisters persevered with determination and faith. They expanded their ministry during the Civil War, visiting war prisoners at the hospital and jail.

Growing enrollment at St. Francis Xavier School necessitated the opening of a new school in 1871. The Sisters of Mercy have continued the focus on education in St. Louis. Over the past 150 years since their arrival in St. Louis, more than 177 Sisters of Mercy have served in more than 20 parish elementary schools and 5 high schools in Missouri. These schools include Christ the King School in University City, Mercy High School in University City, St. Joan of Arc School in South St. Louis, Annunciation School in Webster Groves, and Mercy Junior College in Webster Groves.

Recognizing the ever-growing health care needs of the community, in 1871 the Sisters converted the old St. Francis Xavier School to an infirmary. The hospital struggled financially because many patients were unable to pay, but the Sisters never turned patients away due to lack of funds. Instead, Sisters even sacrificed their mattresses and bedding to accommodate patients. To meet the increased need for their health care services, the Sisters moved the hospital to two other St. Louis sites before relocating to its current location on South New Ballas Road in 1963.

While better known for their work in education and health care, the Sisters have served the people of the St. Louis metropolitan area in numerous other ministries including working with immigrants, providing spiritual direction, hosting groups at their conference and retreat center, and serving the poor.