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THE CANCER REGISTRIES AMENDMENT ACT OF 1992

By Representative Bernie Sanders
May 29, 1992

I am very happy to report to you that on May 28, 1992, the U.S. House of Representatives, by a vote of 260-148, passed the National Institute of Health Authorization bill. Included in that legislation was the Cancer Registries Amendment Act of 1992 which I wrote and introduced in the House several months ago and which Senator Patrick Leahy introduced in the Senate.

The Cancer Registries Act will provide \$30 million a year to the states so that they can establish and/or upgrade cancer registries, which track cancer clusters and identify environmental causes of cancer. Vermont and 18 other states have no working registries. Many states have underfunded and inadequate registries. The legislation would also launch a study to discover why New England leads the country in breast cancer deaths.

It is estimated that 1 out of 3 Americans will be stricken with cancer during the course of their lifetime. Further, breast cancer is rising at almost epidemic proportions. It is believed that 45,000 women in our country will die of breast cancer this year, and that 175,000 women will be diagnosed with the disease. Even more alarming, the incidence of the disease has increased significantly in recent years. It is estimated that 1 in 9 women are afflicted with breast cancer now, as opposed to 1 in 14 in 1966.

I am extremely proud that the lead story in the June issue of *Reader's Digest*, by Dr. John H. Healey, M.D., Chief of Orthopedic Surgery at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, calls the Cancer Registries Amendment Act of 1992 "THE CANCER WEAPON AMERICA NEEDS MOST". In his article, Dr. Healey asks, "Why does the United States lag behind many other Western nations in gathering cancer data that could save thousands of lives and billions of dollars?" With the passage of the Cancer Registries Amendment Act we can finally go forward to end that lag and develop one of the best national systems of cancer registries in the world.

What does a cancer registry do and why is it an extremely important tool in fighting this horrible disease? Let me briefly

discuss a situation that Dr. Healey described in his article. In the mid 1970s in the San Francisco area, the very effective California cancer registry noted that uterine cancer for middle age women had risen by 50% over a six year period and, even worse, had doubled in Marin County. Because the California registry maintained detailed statistics on cancer through their registry, public health officials could begin an immediate investigation as to why uterine cancer was skyrocketing. And, within a short time, they discovered the cause. It appeared that many women in the area were receiving too high doses of estrogen - a hormone used to treat symptoms of menopause. Within three years, as a result of a change in dosage and other procedures, the rate of uterine cancer returned to normal. "Thanks to a good cancer registry, at least 3,000 women a year - in California alone - are spared," writes Dr. Healey.

That's what a cancer registry can do. With detailed information, we can gain clues as to why prostate cancer or colon cancer or breast cancer is higher in one community than in another, or why the cancer rate goes up or down. We can also gain valuable information as to the effectiveness of various kinds of treatments.

In every respect, this legislation was "Vermont made". Not only was the legislation introduced in the Congress by Senator Leahy and myself but, even more importantly, the idea emanated from thousands of Vermonters, led by Joanne Rathgeb and Virginia Soffa, who demanded that the federal government play a much more active role in cancer prevention. It was because of their grassroots, spirited efforts that the Cancer Registries Amendment Act of 1992 was created and that it passed the Congress as swiftly as it did.