Dear Senator Hutchison,

The American Physiological Society (APS) thanks you for your ongoing support of Medical and Prosthetic Research at the department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Research that specifically addresses the medical needs of veterans is an important component of VA health care. The VA health care system currently faces many challenges, including both an aging veteran population and the needs of veterans who are returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan. The medical problems facing many new veterans simply cannot be adequately treated with current medical and psychological understanding and technology. The $13 million decrease in funding proposed by the administration for VA medical and prosthetic research in FY 2007 poses a serious threat to VA medical research at a time when the need for better treatments and health care is acute. The APS urges you to make every effort to increase the budget allocation for VA medical and prosthetic research to $460 million next year.

The APS is a professional society dedicated to fostering research and education as well as the dissemination of scientific knowledge concerning how the organs and systems of the body work. The Society was founded in 1887 and now has more than 10,000 physiologists, including many who conduct research within the VA system.

VA medical research facilities across the country provide veterans access to state-of-the-art medical care. The focus of the VA research program is medical problems that affect veterans, and many VA researchers are also practicing physicians who treat veterans. VA researchers work on problems such as:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Substance abuse
- Traumatic injury rehabilitation
- Amputation and the development of prosthetic limbs
- Brain and spinal cord injury
- Hepatitis C

The medical problems listed above are more prevalent among veterans than the general population, but others such as heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis are typical of any aging population. New treatments developed at VA medical centers have led to healthcare improvements for all Americans. Moreover, the opportunity to
combine research and patient care enables the VA to recruit and retain outstanding clinicians.

In addition to focusing on research and patient care, VA medical researchers also spend time educating the next generations of physician-scientists. Currently, more than half of all practicing physicians in the US receive some of their training at a VA facility. Nevertheless, when adjusted for inflation, recent budgets for medical and prosthetic research at the VA have been well below the inflation rate for the biomedical sciences, currently 3.8% for FY 2007, and this year the administration’s budget calls for funding to be reduced by $13 million. Falling budgets have reduced success rates for grant applications to below 20% and another 66 grants will be lost this year if the proposed budget is enacted. This constant shortfall of funds has strained the infrastructure of VA research, and limited the ability to modernize research facilities. The uncertain state of funding also discourages young physician-scientists from choosing a career at the VA.

The APS joins FASEB and the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research in calling for an increase in the VA medical and prosthetic research to $460 million for FY 2007, with an additional $45 million to be spent on facilities and major equipment. Investment in medical research at the VA will result in better medical treatment for our veterans and all Americans.

Sincerely,

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President
American Physiological Society