

**Text of speech by CPRIT CEO Wayne Roberts
Day at the Capitol Dinner
American Cancer Society/Cancer Action Network – March 3, 2015**

Thank you for that introduction. And thank you for inviting me here this evening.

All of us at the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas—CPRIT—appreciate the support of the ACS Cancer Action Network and other advocates who have worked tirelessly on CPRIT’s behalf in good times and bad.

Your advocacy in 2013 was critical in convincing the Legislature to give CPRIT a second chance.

Thanks in large part to your efforts, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 149, the CPRIT “reform” legislation.

The heavy lifting, of course, was done by Senator Nelson and Representative Keffer on their respective floors.

In fact, it was unanimous in the Senate: 31-0. In the House the tally was closer: 140-3-3.

To Mr. Keffer’s credit, I’d heard you can’t get 100 votes to memorialize a dead man in the House, so that tally speaks volumes on his efforts two years ago.

That type of mandate carries a large responsibility.

We are aware of the hopes and expectations you place on CPRIT.

Of all the questions addressed to CPRIT, the toughest is: “When are you going to find a cure for cancer?”

Since cancer, as you know, is complex and comes in many forms, the cure will come in diverse forms as well.

And with the help of CPRIT funding, advancements in cancer prevention and treatment are happening today, one discovery at a time.

Here are a few concrete examples of progress and success from CPRIT programs:

- Dr. James Allison of MD Anderson, is a CPRIT recruit who has exposed ways to use the body’s immune system to attack cancers, revealing an entirely new way to combat these diseases.

- Nearly 2 million prevention services have been delivered to Texans in all 254 counties. Out of over 481,000 screenings and diagnostics:
 - 38,500 abnormal results were identified;
 - Nearly 3,000 cancer precursors were detected; that’s potentially 3,000 people whose lives may have been saved by CPRIT programs; and
 - 1,365 cancers were found. As a result, many of these lives may have been saved or extended due to CPRIT programs.
- 84 new clinical trials that have enrolled nearly 5,600 patients.
- CPRIT research has led to more than 3,000 published findings; and
- \$288 million in announced product development awards have led to over \$865 million in follow-on funding beyond the required match. (that’s \$1 billion in non-state funding including \$144 million required match)

As many of you know, CPRIT’s \$300 million annual appropriation is small compared to the \$17.9 billion provided annually from other sources, including the private sector, federal government, and foundation/non-profits.

However, if you just look at funding going to Texas, CPRIT is now funding more cancer research in Texas than NCI--in fact, CPRIT funding more than doubles what is available for cancer research.

So CPRIT funding does have a major impact on cancer research and people’s lives in Texas. To make sure that CPRIT leverages its funding, the Oversight Committee adopted priorities for our funding this past November.

In academic research there will be enhanced emphasis on:

- Prevention and early detection research;
- Rare and intractable cancers, including childhood cancer; and
- Computational biology and analytic methods.

In product development research, emphasis remains on:

- Texas companies and relocating companies likely to bring products to market; and
- Funding new companies to fill the “gap”—translation of academic research to practical use.

In prevention, we remain focused on:

- areas and populations where disparities in incidence or mortality exist; and
- Facilitating dissemination across the state.

Last Saturday I spoke on the steps of the Capitol to a gathering of rare disease advocates.

I reiterated what they already knew: for rare diseases and rare cancers there is often no existing effective treatment or cure.

When you look at research funding from all sources, a smaller percentage of dollars are directed at rare diseases—and there are fewer medical experts dedicated to their study and treatment.

It's especially heartbreaking when children die too early of diseases with no treatments or cures.

At CPRIT, as just mentioned, priority is given to prevention and research of **rare** and hard-to-treat cancers—including pediatric and adolescent cancers.

Let me provide a few highlights:

- CPRIT funding seeks new treatments for a highly malignant brain tumor in children—treatments without the many severe neurological and long-lasting side effects that exist now.
- CPRIT funding seeks to identify the genetic links that lead to bone cancer in children and adolescents.
- And one of CPRIT's grantees is seeking ways to increase the survival rate of infants suffering from a rare form of leukemia—

A survival rate under 20 percent for babies is unacceptable.

How do we get to advancements that offer a treatment or possibly even a cure where none previously existed?

CPRIT funding has made it possible to recruit nearly 90 of the top cancer researchers in the world to Texas research institutions. We're well on our way to having the finest cluster of cancer expertise in the world right here in the Lone Star State.

AND...the end game of CPRIT's product development program is to take new drugs and devices from the research lab to the doctor's office to treat people with cancer now.

From the development of the integrated circuit at Texas Instruments in the 1950s...

...through the space race at NASA's Johnson Space Center...

...and Jim Allison's groundbreaking work at MD Anderson to unleash our body's immune system against cancer...

Texas has always been home to innovative people determined to accomplish what hasn't been done—or supposedly can't be done.

The people of this state have the can-do spirit.

As Texans, we must do everything we can to ensure that advancements in rare cancers are not only found more quickly, but found right here in Texas.

Your passion and advocacy in the fight against cancer inspires us daily at CPRIT to work on your behalf.

Keep pressing. Keep the faith.