



Chris Christie's budget must fund cancer research: Opinion

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Cancer research funding can't just be left up to the people to raise. It must be built into the state's budget.

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By Carl Golden

No one legislative proposal reflects a broader, more comprehensive range of government priorities than the state budget.

Appropriating public funds to support a policy agenda is an unmistakable indication of the importance a governor or a Legislature has attached to that agenda.

Once mandated costs — salaries and benefits, debt service and aid to local governments — are factored in, less than 20 percent of the budget remains to fund established or agreed upon priorities.

As deliberations progress, there occasionally emerges a conflict over an issue normally considered innocuous usually because the program involved enjoys bipartisan support and has demonstrated a significant return on its investment.

One such has developed as the Legislature deliberates the **governor's \$34.4 billion budget proposal** — restoring \$1 million to the New Jersey Commission on Cancer Research and \$10 million to the Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey in New Brunswick.

I hold a deep, personal interest in the **outcome of this dispute** and readily, unashamedly concede I'm not
ison flowed into my system, a year of periodic
blood-drawing and analysis, a year of waiting two or three days for the results, and a year of waiting for the
telephone to ring while wondering whether the conversation would begin, "I'm very sorry, but ... "

I purposely scheduled my chemo sessions for Friday afternoons, giving me the weekend to deal with the fatigue, the nausea and the suppression of appetite (when my treatments ended in August 1996, I weighed a svelte 128 pounds) that were the medications' side effects.

I walked alone down that long, dark alley for a year. Only those who've made that walk understand the toll it exacts, not only personally, but also on those around you. The uncertainty and the depression it breeds are mentally draining. Remaining upbeat and hopeful seems impossible. The temptation to surrender, to give in and escape the nagging discomfort, the energy-sapping weariness, and the bleak anxiety of the unknown suddenly has appeal. Perseverance becomes a precious commodity.

I don't consider myself particularly courageous for having endured. I'm lucky; that's all.

There is no cure for cancer, no vaccine to guard against it and research may never discover one. What it has done, though, is develop new and more effective treatment protocols, better ways to manage the disease, fight it to a standstill, force it into remission and keep it there. Just as I benefited from the latest in medical advances nearly 20 years ago, those who suffer the illness now or will be affected in the future will have access to greatly improved treatment options, thanks to ongoing research efforts.

Those who support restoring funding in the budget have touted the economic benefits of a strong research program and of the potential for attracting significant sums of federal and private source funding.

That argument is valid and appropriate, to be sure, and will be repeated as the administration and the Legislature work toward resolving their differences. The fate of the \$11 million will be decided in the next two months as the debate intensifies and the priority choices are narrowed.

For me, I tend to focus on the human element.

The writer Paul Brodeur once said: "Statistics are human beings with the tears wiped off."

Given my history, I'm a statistic. But I know from tears, too.

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