Good afternoon. My name is Mary Woolley and I am the President of Research!America.

Research!America is a national non-profit alliance of patients, academic research institutions, industry, scientific societies and philanthropies, encompassing about 125 million Americans, united in support of discoveries in health. We are committed to achieving faster medical progress by putting research and innovation to work at their full potential, in order to find the solutions to what ails us.

Research has before and will again find these solutions. I’m old enough to remember the fear of polio; the terror of HIV/AIDS – and I’m grateful for the remarkable progress research is making now toward putting HIV/AIDS in the history books along with polio. Right now Americans are rightly worried about health threats ranging from gun violence to Alzheimer’s to autism to cancer, diabetes, mental health challenges of all kinds -- including PTSD -- lupus, neurological disorders, heart disease, drug abuse, antimicrobial resistance, health disparities, the Zika virus and more.

Americans want to know why research isn’t moving faster; why our nation’s elected leaders haven’t made it their top priority to provide the resources and a 21st century policy environment to give research a fighting chance.

I believe that a full-throated commitment to health security is as highly valued by the American public as is a commitment to defense.

When operating at its full-potential, research and innovation is also a driver in finding solutions to what ails our economy. After all, keeping people healthy saves lives and saves money; healthy people stay in the workplace, healthy people are more productive. And research creates jobs -- the life science enterprise writ large employs millions of Americans. People aspire to holding jobs like these -- good jobs involved in discovery, in improving the diagnosis and treatment of patients, in setting the stage for more ‘evidence-based health care,’ in saving lives and saving money, and in preventing disease, thereby saving lots and lots of money.

It’s really a no-brainer.

As a co-founder of Research!America, the advocate and philanthropist Mary Lasker famously said: “if you think research is expensive, try disease!”

The American people believe that speeding medical progress is crucial.

We know this from national surveys we commission regularly. In a national survey conducted earlier this month, a majority of Americans said they would pay an extra dollar a week in taxes
if they knew the dollars were going toward medical research. This finding holds up across age groups, racial and ethnic groups, and regardless of political affiliation. While no one is proposing raising taxes right now to accomplish more research, demonstrated public support for more taxes is about as strong an endorsement for raising the priority of research as one could ask for.

Americans also want to know what their candidates plan to do to speed medical progress.

I’m addressing the Democratic Platform Committee, which prompts me to say that Americans would be well served by more elected officials like Senator Barbara Mikulski, who has been a stalwart champion of public funding and an unflinching champion of enacting private sector incentives. She wants to save lives, strengthen Maryland’s -- and the nation’s -- economy, and create a research pipeline that is more inclusive and productive; she has been doing all this with her characteristic high energy and indomitable commitment -- and with a remarkable degree of success -- for years. Who will take on her mantle of leadership? Even as we wish Senator Mikulski well in her retirement, and hope that her voice will continue to be heard as the unrivaled champion she is, we also urge candidates across the nation to carry forward her legacy, and the legacy of other congressional champions for research whose support and actions have left an indelible mark on medical progress.

Our surveys tell us that 77% of Americans say it is important for the next Congress to assign a high-priority to putting health research and innovation to work to assure continued medical progress.

Accelerating medical progress takes its genius and its strength from across the research ecosystem. It's definitely about robust funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the world's largest funder of basic, or ‘discovery’ research, and which also funds clinical and prevention and translational research. NIH funds researchers in every state as well as at its home campus in Bethesda, Maryland, and it tackles every disease and disability you can think of. It’s a fact that a new insight from one area often stimulates a breakthrough elsewhere; NIH’s well-honed ‘portfolio’ approach to funding across many types of research and many health challenges empowers discovery and has made it the gold standard for the global research enterprise. It amazes most people to hear that the NIH works to achieve the public’s high expectations for the equivalent of about $100 per American per year. It could do so much more with more resources. People rightly ask, “What are we waiting for?”

Achieving progress in health is also about supporting social sciences and behavioral research, equipping the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to fully protect and advance population health, and it is about ensuring that the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) can identify evidence-based solutions to the costly - and deadly - shortcomings in our complex health care system. Medical errors are the fourth leading cause of death in this country. That’s a crisis. AHRQ’s job is to do something about it, yet right now it's running on fumes. CDC may well receive a cut this year. AHRQ is also facing proposed cuts, on top of budget reductions over several years running.
That's got to change.

Speeding medical progress is also about doing what it takes to make sure the life sciences sector of our economy continues to produce new medical advances.

I mentioned earlier that research and innovation contribute to finding solutions to our nation’s economic challenges. Those challenges include rising health care costs. Containing those costs would be much more likely if we could prevent disease in the first place, more likely if we could diagnose a problem properly the first time and treat it effectively every time, more likely if we had more 21st century medications in our toolkit, more likely if we knew more about what works and what is dysfunctional in health care delivery, and more likely if we invested in policy approaches that are based on evidence derived from research. There are many moving parts in the so-called health care system; if we cut corners in our eagerness to cut costs, we threaten the collapse of an ecosystem in which the success of each part depends on the strength of the others.

If we put a bullseye on the back of one or another of the necessary components – AHRQ, say, or private sector medical innovation, not only will patients now and in the future pay dearly, but our fiscal problems may get worse, not better. We need to be serious about spending each health care dollar wisely. Innovators and payers and patients and policymakers are going to have to work that out together. We can't turn on one another; there is too much at stake.

All this to say that federal funding and private sector innovation both matter if patients come first, and we all agree that patients truly must come first.

There are two research-related tenets we respectfully request be incorporated into the Democratic platform:

1) Achieving faster medical progress is an American imperative. We will do what it takes to overcome diseases that rob people we love of hope, independence, and time. We can do this, if we make research and innovation a higher national priority.

2) To accomplish this goal--

- We will grow funding for NIH, fueling research and assuring today’s diverse group of young scientists that they have a bright future in understanding and defeating the scourges that ail us.

- We will bolster funding for CDC, FDA, AHRQ and NSF. These agencies play a crucial role in advancing health and healthcare. They are currently underfunded, a strategic mistake that is impeding the nation’s commitment to health security for all.
We will assure a policy environment that propels rather than holds back private sector medical innovation. We are committed to enabling the smooth functioning of the public-private pipeline and public-private partnerships.

In conclusion, I urge you not take the continued march of medical progress for granted. It’s time to commit to making research for health a much higher national priority and it’s time to take actions that reflect that commitment. We’ll all breathe easier when we do so.

Thank you for your leadership, your commitment to public service, and for the opportunity to share these suggestions.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Woolley
President and CEO
Research!America

www.researchamerica.org