

Introduction

Cancer-Gate: How to Win the Losing Cancer War is essential reading for all public policy makers and citizens alarmed by the health care crisis in America today. Its thesis is as simple as it is disturbing. Contrary to three decades of misleading promises and assurances from the federal National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the non-profit American Cancer Society (ACS), we are losing the winnable war against cancer largely because we have failed to adopt obvious fundamental prevention measures.

In the wake of this groundbreaking book, policy makers and the civil society must critically examine the reasons why the NCI and ACS have virtually ignored cancer prevention other than anti-smoking initiatives. These organizations have spent tens of billions of taxpayer and charity dollars seeking magic-bullet cures, while ignoring more fruitful avenues that could better protect us from industrial and other carcinogens in the first place. It's tautological that the more cancer we prevent, the less cancer there would be to treat.

Since 1971, the NCI's budget has increased 30-fold, while cancer incidence has skyrocketed. No elected official or CEO could survive such a track record of failure. And, as *Cancer-Gate* emphasizes, it is now clear that if we want to turn the tide and embark on a campaign to win the cancer war, there must be a new paradigm that strongly emphasizes the critical need for prioritizing practical cancer prevention programs which have been virtually ignored by the NCI and ACS. Such failure has surely been a contributing factor in the escalation of cancer rates to epidemic proportions, now striking nearly one in every two men and more than one in every three women in their lifetime. This translates into an approximately 50 percent increase in cancer in men and 20 percent increase in women over the course of just one generation. And, as study after study have shown, African American and other minority populations are even more severely affected by this crisis.

These startling facts are detailed in *Cancer-Gate*. The book's fundamental premise is that so much of the carnage is preventable. Preventable, that is if the NCI and ACS get off the dime and does their job.

Alarmingly, *Cancer-Gate* also documents how the NCI and ACS have become dangerously chummy with industrial polluters and special interests, particularly the pharmaceutical industry, which aggressively promotes new anti-cancer drugs,

even when there is little evidence that they are effective. In this regard, the book notes a particularly disturbing comment from a recent NCI director who admitted that the NCI has become a “government pharmaceutical company.” The *Chronicle of Philanthropy* similarly has charged that “the ACS is more interested in accumulating wealth than saving lives.” And, for the first time, Epstein explains in this book how the NCI and ACS are sitting on mounds of information about avoidable industrial causes of cancer, while failing to make this information available to the public.

For years, I have argued that the disproportionate number of hazardous waste sites in African American communities is a cause of cancer and many other illnesses that can be traced to toxic substances in local communities. As such, I have also argued that the Department of Justice, in Republican and Democratic administrations alike, has failed to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and other laws, which prevent government actions, such as hazardous waste permitting, that result in disproportionate adverse effects on minority communities. The issues raised in this book chronicle what is yet another major health care failure, and makes the central point that so much of the disease and death—which hits minority communities hardest—is avoidable. As the ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee, Dean of the Congressional Black Caucus, former Chairman of the House Government Operations Committee, and representative of the people of Detroit, I have long felt that we are sinking too many precious dollars into federal institutions without sufficient accountability or reporting requirements that would provide measurable outcomes of these taxpayer-subsidized programs. *Cancer-Gate* emphatically makes the case for fixing this problem and for creating key reforms—right-to-know laws, budgetary shifts in favor of prevention inside the National Institute of Health, for a start—that will ensure that the public interest is protected and promoted through these hallowed institutions. Further, as the book implores, we need to take the special-interest influence out of our cancer institutions and to require that the tomes of data showing how cancer can be prevented are released to the public.

The book thus provides policy makers, grassroots organizers, and everyday citizens with a commonsense roadmap for change. If taken, these steps could save millions of lives who needlessly lost because there are not adequate federal laws to protect the public from cancer-causing pesticides, industrial air and water pollutants, medical x-ray technology, and exposure to carcinogens in the workplace. The reader, whether member of Congress or concerned citizen, will thus be empowered with critical information needed to start demanding change and protecting themselves and their families.

It’s time to hold our government and these much vaunted institutions accountable, to make the cancer war part of our homeland security effort. For this is a war that we can win if the public merely demands that Congress require the NCI to disclose information on these chemical attacks on our communities.

This exposé of the NCI and ACS, and the proposed reforms of public policy, have been endorsed by over a hundred leading independent experts in cancer prevention and public health, as well as by activist citizen groups. *Cancer-Gate* is a must read for all who are alarmed by the modern cancer epidemic. The book should also serve as a roadmap for policy makers on how to reverse the 30-year failed war on this most deadly disease.

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.