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Senate

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein On the Death of Dana Reeve

Mrs. FEINSTEIN: Mr. President, I rise to pay tribute to a remarkable woman who has shown Americans what courage is all about. That woman is Dana Reeve.

I knew Dana as a smiling, beautiful woman standing behind Christopher Reeve's wheelchair, accompanying him to DC to testify in support of advancing stem cell research. Since Chris's death, Dana was the face of this fight on behalf of patients across the country with spinal cord injury, Parkinson's, juvenile diabetes and countless other illnesses.

I thought that after everything Dana had gone through with Chris that she would have time to smell the flowers and be in the sun. But apparently that was not meant to be.

My heart goes out to Dana and Chris's son William, Dana's stepchildren Matthew and Alexandra, and the entire Reeve and Morosini families during what is and has been a very difficult time.

Dana was the picture of steadfast loyalty and compassionate care. She and Chris taught us all that life is short and that we should all have the courage and hope to "go forward."

Dana carried that spirit with her in her drive to push Congress to expand embryonic stem cell research and to expand access to new treatments and therapies for thousands of Americans with spinal cord injuries.

Dana was an activist, actress, singer, motivational speaker and published author. Dana was a founding board member of the Christopher Reeve Foundation and succeeded her late husband as chairperson in 2004.

She created and led the Foundation's Quality of Life initiatives.

She received numerous awards for her work, most notably the Shining Example Award from Proctor & Gamble in 1998, an American Image Award from the AAFA in 2003, and the American Cancer Society named her Mother of the Year in 2005.

Dana, the person, was a tireless advocate for people with spinal cord injuries. For me personally, she and Chris will forever be the shining lights in the great national debate for advancing medical research.

It is with sadness that I stand before this body, more than 9 months after the historic vote in the House to expand Federally funded embryonic stem cell research, and still there has been no vote in the Senate.

With each day that passes the research that could one day lead to cures and treatments for millions of Americans with deadly and debilitating diseases is being held up.

It is incomprehensible to me that we have a bill, which has already passed the House, that may help millions of Americans but instead is just sitting, languishing in the Senate despite some overtures or promises that it would be taken up by this body.

It is time for the Senate to do exactly what the House did. It is time for the Senate to take up

and pass the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, the Castle-DeGette bill, with no amendments and no alternatives. I believe we have the votes to pass this bill today and send it to the President.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge Dana's last struggle, her battle against cancer. This terrible disease is a very personal one for me. I have lost many loved ones to it. The elimination of death and suffering due to cancer has been one of my highest priorities since coming to the Senate.

Dana died of lung cancer and, as many of you have read in the papers, Dana was a non-smoker. I believe she had stage one metastatic lung cancer. In fact, over 60 percent of new lung cancers are diagnosed in people who never smoked or who managed to quit smoking even decades ago.

While cigarette smoking is by far the most important risk factor for lung cancer, many other factors play a role.

Lung cancer remains the deadliest form of cancer. In 2006, it will account for more than 162,000 cancer deaths, or about 29 percent of all cancer deaths. Since 1987, more women have died each year of lung cancer than from breast cancer.

Screening for lung cancer is years behind screening for other cancers, which means that when it is diagnosed, the disease is often already in its late stages, which is what I suspect happened to Dana Reeve.

The 5-year survival rate for all stages of lung cancer is only 15 percent. Compare this to the overall 5-year survival rate of 65 percent for all cancers diagnosed between 1995 and 2001.

Clearly we can and must do better. Increased NIH research for lung cancer is essential and we must press for better screening tools for lung cancer. I plan to address both of these issues in comprehensive cancer legislation I plan to introduce shortly.

In closing, it is my sincere hope that the love Dana and Chris shared for each other will reunite them wherever their journeys take them from here. Dana left us far too soon--in her mid-40s--but she left us with her fighting spirit and the will to push forward so that one day we may find treatments and cures for those living with spinal cord injuries and other disabling conditions.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.