

First Lady of the United States visits Louisiana Cancer Research Center

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Erik Flemington, PhD, Zimmerman Endowed Professor of Cancer Research at Tulane, talks about his cancer research with First Lady Jill Biden, Senator Bill Cassidy, and Congressman Troy Carter. (Photo by Frank Aymami Photography)

With a message of unity and hope, First Lady of the United States Jill Biden, EdD, and U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy, MD, toured the Louisiana Cancer Research Center (LCRC) Friday. Their visit underscored President Joe Biden's Cancer Moonshot – a mission to cut the death rate from cancer by 50% over the next 25 years.

“We see the power of that collaboration here, where LSU, Tulane, Xavier University, and Ochsner are working together under one roof and in communities throughout the state,” said Biden. “The breakthroughs and discoveries that you make here, every cancer-causing virus we learn how to defeat, every clinical trial that ends in success, become the miracles that our families are praying for.”

Louisiana has one of the highest rates of cancer mortality in the United States. LCRC clusters the area's leading cancer research institutions into one high-profile hub to share resources, attract bigger and more prestigious national grant awards, encourage inter-institutional research, and, ultimately, earn a coveted federal National Cancer Institute cancer center designation.

"This is a great opportunity for the LCRC to get the attention of state and national leadership," said Hua Lu, PhD, Professor and Reynolds and Ryan Families Chair in Translational Cancer at Tulane University School of Medicine. "Louisiana is disproportionately impacted by cancer, but we are underfunded. This visit gives us great energy to continue moving forward."

Friday's tour brought Biden and Cassidy to the lab of Erik Flemington, PhD, Zimmerman Endowed Professor of Cancer Research at Tulane. The lab studies the Epstein Barr virus, which causes some types of lymphomas and stomach cancers, and which is a key etiological agent of multiple sclerosis. The lab is working to identify vulnerabilities in viral pathways that can be utilized in therapeutic development.

"It was an honor for us to represent Tulane University and the Louisiana Cancer Research Center in our visit with the First Lady and Senator Cassidy, who are such strong proponents of cancer research," said Flemington.

The President's budget for FY 2024 invests more money in the Cancer Moonshot, including nearly \$8 billion for the National Cancer Institute and National Institutes of Health. The Cancer Moonshot is the mission of their lives, the First Lady told the LCRC crowd Friday. Like so many other American families, the Bidens have been affected by cancer.

"It is exciting to have Dr. Biden spotlight the LCRC's role in the national efforts to combat cancer and through her visit to reinforce local support for the LCRC mission to overcome cancer-related issues in our state," said Victoria Belancio, PhD, Associate Professor of Structural & Cellular Biology at Tulane University School of Medicine, and Associate Director for Cancer Education at Tulane Cancer Center. "She is a genuine person facing the same health issues that many of our residents do."