

Dear Representative Bernardy,

I am writing on behalf of myself, a spinal cord injured American for 44 years. I'm also writing on behalf of my sister and brother in law Amy and Craig Hess and their children who live just north of your district up Rt. 169 in Anoka.

Where are the next milestones and basic science breakthroughs? What political leader wouldn't want to make the investment to position themselves to take advantage of such breakthroughs for the sake of their communities? Representative Bernardy, I believe you are one of those leaders and I write to urgently argue that it is dangerously shortsighted to zero out the \$6 million SCI/TBI Research Grant Program in the current budget.

One of the lessons of the past year is that however one handles the short-term crises and chaos of the present moment, the smartest investments in community, politics and science are the ones with "eyes on the prize" of the future. A simple investment in mRNA technology years ago as a way of creating a possible new and more orderly platform for the develop of vaccines led to the reversal of a global pandemic and an unprecedented level of readiness for the next pathogen. One could have easily argued that mRNA was a dubious dead end and stayed away. Indeed, that is precisely the reason why the mRNA science was put on the shelf in favor of developing more oncology drugs and other medical science investments with more predictable short-term payouts. Now mRNA is the science at the center of a budding new industry.

The same story, I believe sits quietly inside the original Fiscal 2022 Minnesota state budget. It is even more powerful than the mRNA story, potentially addresses a four-thousand-year-old medical puzzle and sets the stage for a whole new targeted approach to medicine that will eventually make today's medicine look like the stone age.

The paltry \$6 million cost savings sacrifices precisely the future-looking insight that is the key to basic science as described above. This SCI/TBI grant program also does three additional things: 1. It empowers young neuroscience undergraduates, medical students and residents, doctoral candidates and clinicians to widen interest in this field, 2. It strengthens the model of patient directed science that merges basic research with needs of people with spinal and brain injuries because these grants are overseen by patient and family groups, and 3. It sustains a stellar track record of functional success in clinical trials of a wide variety of scientific approaches rather than a single "fashionable" technology. You can be sure that these research grants will not get lost in "petri dish abstractions" that benefit no one.

This \$6 million empowers and activates a unique and courageous community of patients, family and therapists eager for human trials of new ideas. It places Minnesota at the intersection of the cutting edge of a revolution in neuroscience, implant and robotics technology, and genetics to address central nervous system injury. Further, success in SCI and TBI is the doorway to a vast new horizon of medicine to address dementia, stroke, aging and create tightly targeted therapies for nervous system challenges of the next century.

It was the ancient Egyptians who first identified the curious qualities of the nervous system that result in permanent paralysis. Their eloquence speaks to me as a spinal cord injured adult in the 21st century. There is no deeper challenge to science before us now and no greater benefit to humanity in this unquestionably critical forward-thinking initiative.

Sincerely,

John Hockenberry, American Journalist and Author, Former host of Talk of the Nation, NPR, CBS Middle East Correspondent, He has written for [The New York Times](#), [The New Yorker](#), [Wired](#), [The Columbia Journalism Review](#), [Metropolis](#), [The Washington Post](#), and [Harper's Magazine](#).

Amy Hess and Craig Hess, Anoka