



December 3, 2010

The Honorable Patrick J. Kennedy
United States House of Representatives
407 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Kennedy:

Thank you for your passionate and courageous presentation at the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) meeting in San Diego last month. The SfN Council and its membership were deeply inspired by your vision.

The idea of a “moonshot” to conquer brain disease through a national commitment to neuroscience has the potential to transform the lives of people with thousands of brain-based diseases and disorders. It will also invigorate the field and enhance how it works, while helping to increase governmental and public understanding of the central role of research as an engine for health and the economy. Your observation about the impending tidal wave of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder among returning veterans also was deeply compelling. Indeed, progress in understanding the neurobiological mechanisms underlying TBI and PTSD would provide insights and interventions relevant to numerous other conditions.

The SfN Council has been actively discussing your request that SfN identify gaps in the knowledge base and research infrastructure that are essential to address. We agree that making choices about scientific priorities, the tools most important to develop, and the mechanisms to support real innovation is central to the success of this new effort. SfN welcomes your invitation to assist your efforts. In the view of the SfN’s leadership, core priorities should include the following:

- **Identify critical research areas and gaps in scientific knowledge**
- **Support the most creative science**, both emerging topics and innovative approaches
- **Ensure outstanding young scientists are inspired and motivated** to continue in research and are free to take risks and innovate
- **Establish new partnerships across disciplines** that are currently far apart and disconnected
- **Enrich the scientific infrastructure by developing new cutting-edge technologies** to explore how genes, cells, neural networks and systems operate in the healthy brain and how normal processes are altered in the diseased or injured brain
- **Develop and support coordinating mechanisms**, helping researchers collaborate, share resources, and exchange ideas and information among different institutions both nationally and internationally
- **Remove barriers to new treatments** through radically rethinking partnerships between academic laboratories, the pharmaceutical industry, and health care providers
- **Ensure a sustained and aggressive national research funding commitment** that enables progress on all of the above.

In addition to endorsing the articulated priorities above, SfN has offered to assist and support Steve Hyman as he provides leadership on the development of a coherent scientific program and agenda for the May event and beyond. We are committed to work in a thoughtful, rigorous and focused way to rapidly establish a scientific agenda in a manner that ensures breadth of vision, the highest scientific integrity, and a solid foundation for attacking the most difficult obstacles impeding progress on brain disease, while helping to identify critical new directions in basic and translational neuroscience and barriers to progress.

Input from such a broad group of leading imaginative scientists – and a short but important period for review and feedback from a somewhat larger cohort of scientists – is crucial to identifying priorities for a research agenda of the scale you propose. The formation of this working group draws on deep SfN expertise and the voluntary commitment of our scientific leaders. The organization uses similar approaches for a variety of activities, including program development for its annual meeting, which is the world's largest venue for organized discussion of emerging neuroscience discoveries. The approach is deliberate and systematic in ensuring that it spans disciplines and levels of investigation, and that it fosters collaboration among them.

SfN is excited to be part of this transformative campaign. By collaborating to shape priorities, our partnership can help instill confidence in the project's success and enthusiasm for the moonshot's trajectory, while also helping those who will implement this vision understand the role they will play.

A generation ago, your uncle, President Kennedy, leveraged his vision and position to call scientists and the nation to a new goal of advancing and harnessing humankind's understanding of space. Today, you offer a new paradigm in which to consider a similar approach for brain research. Working together to develop a rigorous research plan rooted in scientific knowledge and to secure aggressive funding to realize that plan, SfN is an enthusiastic partner in pursuit of our shared goal: to advance and apply understanding of the brain and nervous system for the betterment of humankind.

We look forward to our continued collaboration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan G. Amara". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Susan G. Amara
President, Society for Neuroscience
Detre Professor and Chair, Neurobiology
University of Pittsburgh