
(February 22, 2007) Illinois congressional members pledge support

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Illinois congressional members pledge support
for NIU proton cancer treatment and research center

DeKalb, Ill. - Support continues to grow for Northern Illinois University's plan to bring proton therapy, the most sophisticated form of cancer treatment available today, to Chicago's western suburbs.

NIU President John Peters last week traveled to Washington, D.C., where members of the Illinois congressional delegation pledged to back the plan to build a world-class cancer treatment and research center at the DuPage National Technology Park in West Chicago.

The center will eventually treat 1,500 patients annually, providing state-of-the-art proton therapy to patients across Illinois and the Midwest.

Proton therapy is an advanced, highly effective form of radiation treatment, utilizing proton beams to treat cancer. Non-invasive and painless, it is a preferred treatment in certain adult and pediatric cancers. Although the treatment is covered by numerous insurance plans, proton therapy is currently unavailable in Illinois.

"I'm thrilled to see that NIU has taken the lead to bring proton therapy to the people of Illinois," said U.S. Rep. Ray LaHood (R-Ill.). "This cancer treatment facility will save lives and improve the quality of life for countless others. I'm happy to support this plan."

LaHood was joined by U.S. Reps. Don Manzullo (R-Ill.), Dan Lipinski (D-Ill.), Judy Biggert (R-Ill.), Melissa Bean (D-Ill.), Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) and Danny Davis (D-Ill.) in voicing their support for the plan. (See related comments.)

U.S. Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) and U.S. Rep. J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) pledged to work on behalf of the center when plans were unveiled in October. NIU is seeking state and federal funds to cover roughly one-third of the estimated \$120 million project cost.

"Our Illinois representatives in Congress are of one voice on the NIU proton therapy project," Peters said. "They understand the necessity of bringing proton therapy, a technology that was advanced decades ago at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, back home to Illinois. The treatment and research center will be a major resource for

cancer patients, as well as for students in numerous health-related fields, and further establish the state as a worldwide leader in health care technologies."

The university has received \$3.3 million in federal funding for formal planning of a non-profit proton therapy center at the DuPage National Technology Park. The park is contiguous to the northern boundary of Fermilab, which in the mid-1980s developed the first U.S.-based proton-therapy accelerator for use at a cancer treatment center in California.

Proton therapy is now recognized as the most precise and advanced form of radiation treatment available today, according to the National Association for Proton Therapy (NAPT). Conventional radiation often radiates healthy tissue in its path and surrounding the tumor site. In contrast, proton therapy more efficiently targets the tumor, thus leaving intact the surrounding healthy tissue and organs. Patients experience minimal side effects, if any.

The NIU center will deliver proton therapy for the treatment of pediatric, prostate and head/neck cancers, as well as for treatment of patients suffering from certain ophthalmologic disorders. The facility also will advance research while educating and training health professionals in the growing field of particle therapy. NIU intends to partner with area academic medical centers, hospitals and physicians to provide this treatment.

Once funding is secured, the university will break ground in 2008 on a facility with four separate treatment rooms. The center complex is expected to total about 100,000 square feet of space on 13 acres of tech-park land. Plans call for treatments to begin in 2011.