

**FINAL: Taped Remarks for the Annual Conference of the
North American Spine Society / National Association of Spine Specialists**

- Hi, I'm Congressman Jim Langevin. While I regret I couldn't be with you in person, I'd like to thank the North American Spine Society and the National Association of Spine Specialists for affording me the opportunity to share my thoughts with you at your annual conference.
- For those of you unfamiliar with my story, I was injured at the age of 16 while volunteering as a police cadet in the Explorer Scout program in my home city of Warwick, when a gun accidentally discharged, severing my spinal cord and rendering me quadriplegic. As I lay in my hospital bed, I wondered what life could possibly have in store for me next. How would I find my path knowing the challenges ahead of me? But I have to say that I drew strength and inspiration from other people with disabilities who had accomplished both ordinary and extraordinary things before me. They first and foremost taught me that there was, indeed, life after a disability.
- This was also reinforced by the tremendous outpouring of support that my community showed for me and my family after my accident. That kindness is what inspired me to give something back to them and run for public office in 1986, when I was elected a Delegate to Rhode Island's Constitutional Convention. This began my long and fulfilling career in public service that led me to serve in the Rhode Island General Assembly, two terms as Secretary of State and my eventual election as the first quadriplegic to the United States House of Representatives in 2000.
- However, I would not have made it through such a traumatic event without the outstanding care of the doctors, nurses, physical therapists and other health providers that treated me with expertise and compassion throughout my recovery. You are all on the front lines of care, providing treatment to the injured and driving research in new therapies and interventions that are currently and will continue to change the course of medicine. And I would like to take a moment to thank you all for your commitment to improving the health and quality of life for your patients.
- As many of you know, September was National Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Month, which allowed us to educate the public, celebrate the progress made in preventive measures and treatment protocols, and reflect on the continued challenges and opportunities that remain ahead. I was personally pleased to see the updated Guidelines for the Management of Acute Cervical Spine and Spinal Cord Injuries, published in the March 2013 edition of Neurosurgery. And I personally commend the authors and contributors to this work, including one of my own constituents, Dr. Beverly Walters.
- I strongly believe that the best treatments will be driven by the highest quality, evidenced-based practice of medicine, and one critical factor of that is investment in research and development. That's why I have strongly opposed cuts to the National Institutes of Health, which drive a large amount of extramural research. In fact, I think we should be redoubling our efforts to invest in this research, which would not only drive innovation, but also our economy.
- Further, with so many of our service members and veterans coming home with blast-related traumatic injuries, it is incumbent on us all to make sure that the most effective treatments are available. Last year, I was extremely pleased to champion a successful effort to double the funding of Spinal Cord Injury Research being conducted through the Department of Defense medical research program from

\$15 to \$30 million dollars. As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I have proudly worked with appropriators to fight to continue that funding in this year's appropriations bill.

- However, I realize there is more at stake here than just research and development. The only way health care providers will successfully meet the increasing demands on our health care system is to ensure their reimbursements reflect the true cost of providing care. That is why I am a strong advocate for permanently repealing the onerous Sustainable Growth Rate formula, or SGR, and replacing it with a more equitable reimbursement system.
- Doctors simply can't provide quality care with the looming uncertainty they won't be paid, and the cost to repeal the SGR is at an historically low level. It won't be easy, but we must seize on this opportunity to correct this problem for good. If we provide certainty and support to the medical community, then our broader efforts to reform the health care delivery system will be more successful.
- Finally, I want to express the importance of your engagement on these issues. I could not do my job in Congress effectively without your collaboration, dedication and passion. So I encourage all of you to reach out to your members of Congress, in both the House and the Senate, to share your thoughts and views on all of these important issues. You are the experts in your respective fields and you can provide us with the knowledge and resources to make effective decisions. It is with your help that we will solve these problems, and it is with a shared conviction that we will forge new alliances and find new opportunities to enhance the entire medical establishment.
- I thank you again for your time, and I look forward to working with you to provide the best possible care to spinal cord patients everywhere.