

## **Coburn fights lobbyists playing politics with the lives of cancer victims – Senator and former two-time cancer survivor unfairly characterized in stance on breast cancer research**

[Fran Visco's shrill diatribe](#) against doctor and U.S. Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) may satisfy her desire to lash out at her political opponents, but does nothing to advance the fight against breast cancer. (A quick scan of Federal Election Commission records shows that Visco, a former Clinton appointee, has a clear preference for Democratic politicians [see below]. Since 1999 she has contributed \$4,500 to various candidates and party organizations – all of whom happen to be Democrats.)  
<http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/norindsea.shtml>

Visco portrays breast cancer as a political issue, and therein lays the problem. Breast cancer is a disease that is best fought with sound science and public health policy, not political rhetoric such as her vitriolic headline. Claiming that Dr. Coburn has a secret desire to see women drop dead of breast cancer is obscene. Such rhetoric is beneath the dignity of someone who is leading an organization as esteemed as the National Breast Cancer Coalition.

Dr. Coburn does not need to prove his cancer credentials to anyone, but it is interesting to note that he is a practicing physician who has treated patients with many forms of cancer, is himself a two-time cancer survivor, has had family members die of breast cancer and currently has a sister and sister-in-law with breast cancer. Hardly the bio of someone who wants to see women “drop dead” of this disease ...

The legislation Visco is touting as a Holy Grail for breast cancer research duplicates ongoing work and is essentially an earmark for a lobbying group that the National Institutes of Health has not requested. House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Joe Barton (R-TX), who also opposes the legislation, put it well when he said, “We have to say ‘let the NIH be the NIH’ and stop attempting to micromanage, even with the best of intentions.”

Dr. Coburn believes that scientists at NIH, not politicians or activists, are best-equipped to allocate our scarce research dollars. Putting disease fighting primarily in the hands of politicians would reward not the most promising avenues of research but the coalition that can raise the most money, host the best fundraisers for candidates, and run the best 30-second attack ad. Everyone with cancer deserves research that can save the most lives with the best use of research dollars – whether it’s a woman with breast cancer or a 4-year-old with leukemia.

Former Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan liked to say that everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts. Some key facts about this bill:

NIH already has the authority to pursue the policies outlined in S. 757 and is trying them. Research is being conducted at four Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Centers, which are in their second year of operation. Additionally, through other research approaches, NIH is already spending more than \$100 million per year to study a potential link between breast cancer and the environment.

Combating breast cancer is a major national priority. Overall, NIH is spending \$690 million per year on breast cancer research. That’s almost twice as much as is spent on any other type of cancer research. Prostate cancer is the second biggest cancer research investment of NIH at \$373 million. In addition to NIH research, the Department of Defense is spending \$150 million each year on breast cancer research. That’s a total federal investment of \$840 million. Of course, more money may be needed but he believes scientists, not politicians or partisan lobbyists, should determine which avenues of research hold the most promise.

Dr. Coburn will continue to fight for sound public health policies that will combat all forms of cancer. As a member of the House of Representatives, Dr. Coburn supported doubling NIH’s budget, co-sponsored the Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Treatment Act that ensures treatment for women diagnosed with breast and cervical cancer, and was one of only ten co-sponsors of the Stamp Out Breast Cancer Act that raised \$35 million for breast cancer research.

Dr. Coburn has also indicated that he would support S. 757 if one word in the bill was changed to give NIH more control over research decisions. He will not, however, compromise the integrity of NIH’s scientific peer review process to appease an angry lobbyist who seems to be using a respected public health coalition as a front for her own personal political agenda.