

Testimony of

**Mr. Sugar Ray Leonard
World Champion Boxer**

At the Hearing Entitled:

**“Type 1 Diabetes Research:
Real Progress and Real Hope for a Cure”**

**Wednesday, June 24, 2009
9:00 a.m.**

**Before the
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs**

Good morning Senator Collins, Senator Lieberman, and members of the Committee. I am Sugar Ray Leonard, and I appreciate this opportunity to appear before you today. I would like to testify about the burden of diabetes and the need for continued research funding to cure this devastating disease.

First, I would like to thank Senator Collins for her unwavering dedication to people with diabetes. As a diabetes advocate, I know how grateful we all are to have you as one of our champions.

It is wonderful to be here in Washington, DC as part of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation's Children's Congress. I grew up not far from here, in Palmer Park, Maryland. My teenage years were spent in the boxing ring, winning a number of amateur boxing championships. I won National Golden Glove Championships, AAU championships, and gold medals at both the Pan American Games and the 1976 Olympics in Montreal.

During this time of great personal accomplishment, privately my family faced tremendous challenges as my father struggled to manage his diabetes. We are not alone in this fight. Nationwide, more than 24 million people have diabetes, a chronic disease that imposes a huge emotional and financial burden on patients and their families.

I know all too well the toll that diabetes can take on a family. As I closed the book on my amateur boxing career, I planned to begin a new chapter in my life as a college student at the University of Maryland, but I had to face the reality of my father's illness, and the incredible medical bills that resulted from his life with diabetes. My decision to turn professional was based largely on the desire to help my family cover the costs of my father's care.

Due to the long list of complications associated with diabetes, the cost of this disease is overwhelming for any family. But it's also overwhelming for the nation and our health care system. Diabetes costs are currently estimated at \$174 billion each year -- \$116 billion in direct medical costs and \$58 billion in lost productivity and disability. In California, where I now live, the direct and indirect costs of diabetes totaled more than \$24 billion in 2007.

Thankfully, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation has partnered with the federal government to make a meaningful investment in diabetes research. I was proud to serve as an International Walk Chairman for JDRF, which has provided more than \$1.3 billion in funding for type 1 diabetes research over the years. Last year alone, JDRF funded more than \$150 million in diabetes research.

With the leadership of Sen. Collins and our many other diabetes champions on Capitol Hill, the federal government has been a real partner along our path toward a cure for diabetes. We are so thankful to Congress for renewing the Special Diabetes Program. That program provides \$150

million each year for diabetes research at the National Institutes of Health and an equal amount for the treatment and prevention of diabetes in American Indian and Alaska Native populations.

Since its inception in 1997, the Special Diabetes Program has funded research that has shed important light on the causes of type 1 diabetes, as well as who's at risk for developing the disease. The research funded by the Special Diabetes Program is unique because its discoveries are important not only to people with type 1 diabetes but also to people who suffer from similar auto-immune diseases. The therapeutic advances in diabetes complications made possible through the Special Diabetes Program also apply to people with type 2 diabetes, making this program a critical component of any effort to fight diabetes. Please help us keep up the momentum behind this research by ensuring the renewal of the Special Diabetes Program.

Life with diabetes is sort of like life in the boxing ring. Some days, you don't feel on top of your game, and your opponent can get the best of you. Other days, you're managing the fight well and able to outsmart and outbox your opponent. One of my most memorable fights was my re-match against Roberto Duran. I lost my welterweight crown to Duran just a few months earlier, and I couldn't wait to get my title back. I fought a smart and skillful match. With just seconds to go in the 8th round, Duran suddenly walked back to his corner, threw up his hands and said, "*no mas.*" No more. He gave up.

Now, it would be easy for these children here today to say "*no mas.*" The fight against diabetes is a tough one. Some days, nothing seems more difficult, more impossible, to battle. There are days we all think about saying "*no mas.*" But it's clear these children have fight in them. They're willing to go as many rounds as it takes to beat this formidable opponent. And we have you in our corner. Thanks to Congress' support for the Special Diabetes Program, the advancements made through research are bringing us closer to the cure that will allow these children to finally knock out diabetes.

Thank you again for having me here to testify today, and I look forward to answering your questions.