

# Obama signs bill boosting spending on cancer research

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President Barack Obama signs the 21st Century Cures Act, Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016, in the South Court Auditorium in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House complex in Washington. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

On a "bittersweet day" that brought back memories of loved ones lost, President Barack Obama signed into law legislation that makes new investments in cancer research and battling drug abuse.

Obama signed the bill Tuesday at a ceremony on the White House campus flanked by Vice President Joe Biden and key lawmakers from both parties. The 55-year-old president recounted that his own mother did not even reach his age, dying of cancer in her early 50s.

"It's not always easy to remember, but being able to honor those we've lost in this way and to know that we may be able to prevent other families from feeling that same loss, that makes it a good day," Obama said. "It's a good day to see us doing our jobs."

The 21st Century Cures Act invests \$1.8 billion for a cancer research "moonshot" that is strongly supported by Biden. The vice president's son, Beau, died of brain cancer in 2015.

The bill also authorizes giving states \$1 billion over two years to prevent and treat the abuse of heroin and other opioids and addictive drugs.

Overall, the measure plans \$6.3 billion in new spending over the coming decade. The bill also streamlines the approval process for drugs and medical devices at the Food and Drug Administration, which some patient advocacy groups opposed.



President Barack Obama embraces Vice President Joe Biden after signing the 21st Century Cures Act, Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016, in the South Court Auditorium in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House complex in Washington. Standing behind, from left are, Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of Calif., Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., and Rep. Diana DeGette, D-Colo. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

Public Citizen said the bill pressures the FDA to approve new medical products and new uses for drugs based on weaker evidence of safety and efficacy.

"This bill remains a bad deal for patient safety, offering a small, temporary and non-guaranteed increase in public research funding at the expense of permanently weakening oversight by the Food and Drug Administration," Public Citizen said.

The signing ceremony represented a rare day in Obama's presidency, where lawmakers from both parties gathered to celebrate bipartisan joy over the passage of consequential legislation.

"I hope this bodes well for what will come next year—that we're back working together" Biden said.

Biden said he believed the bill would inject new urgency into fighting cancer and would give millions of Americans hope that they will be able to have their lives extended through research that will bring about new cures and treatments.



President Barack Obama hugs Kate Grubb, and Vice President Joe Biden hugs her husband David Grubb before signing the 21st Century Cures Act, Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016, in the South Court Auditorium in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House complex in Washington. The Grubb family,

from Charleston W.Va., lost their daughter Jessie Grubb in the spring of 2016 after a long battle with substance abuse. Grubb's story gained recognition after Obama visited Charleston in October 2015, focusing on the drug epidemic.(AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

"Every day, millions of people are praying, praying for hope, praying for time," Biden said.

Obama also used the ceremony to make a pitch for his signature health insurance law that expanded coverage for 20 million Americans, but also faces the prospect of repeal in the next administration.

"I'm hopeful in the years ahead that Congress keeps working together in a bipartisan fashion to move us forward, rather than backward in support of the health of our people," Obama said.

Obama was introduced by David and Kate Grubb of West Virginia who lost their daughter Jessica in March to a drug overdose. David Grubb shared his daughter's struggle with addiction when Obama visited the state in October 2015. He said Jessica wanted treatment, but the closest place they could find for treatment was in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Grubb said the funding would make it possible for communities "to have the resources, to build the facilities, to do the kind of education that's absolutely needed so we can address this problem."

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