

“No More Cancer!”

*I*t was one of those days that remind you why, in the time before air conditioning, Washington, D.C. virtually shut down in the summer. The humidity got a head start into the 90s early in the morning, the temperature soon passed it, and the sun was unrelenting. But the oppressive weather didn't stop 150,000 people representing 600 cancer organizations from gathering on the National Mall to raise the profile of cancer. Hundreds of thousands more rallied in 200 cities across America that Saturday, September 26, 1998. The group on The Mall aimed their chants of “No More Cancer!” just a few hundred yards east toward the dome of the U.S. Capitol.

And it was a turning point. Since that day in 1998, Congress has doubled the federal investment in cancer research.

They called it “THE MARCH: Coming Together to Conquer Cancer,” a sincere, if unwieldy, name for the maturing of the anti-cancer movement. Taking a cue from the AIDS activists of the 1980s, the previously staid collection of cancer advocacy organizations coalesced into a national force that could not be ignored.

The roots of this extraordinary event reached back three years to November 1995 during the National Cancer Summit. PCF executives met with Ellen Stovall, executive director of the NCCS, the cancer survivorship group, and Amy Langer, head of the Breast Cancer Alliance. Milken, who had been stressing the idea that the cancer community should work together rather than

pit one disease against another, remembers the meeting:

“As the Prostate Cancer Foundation had begun establishing a public persona, we delivered the message that we and other cancer groups were on the same team. We were asking for a dramatic increase in cancer funding at the NCI, and had begun to reach out to groups such as the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship which, at the time, didn’t even have a computer or a secretary. The PCF began to help provide some of that infrastructure. As we increased our fund-raising capabilities, we learned that other foundations were having trouble raising money. That’s why it was so important to stress that we were standing together.”

No more tuning out

The leaders of all the cancer organizations had left the 1995 Cancer Summit pledging to stay in touch and coordinate more of their future efforts. A few months later, in February 1996, Milken again appeared on CNN’s *Larry King Live* to discuss nutrition and cancer. Chatting with King after the show, he suggested a future show focusing on the lives of cancer survivors and their growing assertiveness in demanding more action in the War on Cancer. King readily agreed—after the positive public response to the previous November’s show on the genetics of cancer, he no longer feared that the subject would make viewers tune out.

Meanwhile NCI Director Richard Klausner had asked cancer activist Ellen Sigal, Ph.D., a member of the NCI’s Board of Scientific Advisors, to coordinate activities commemorating the 25th anniversary of the National Cancer Act. Sigal had been having conversations with the PCF’s new executive director, Richard (“Rick”) Atkins, M.D., about ideas for “mobilizing Congress,” a theme she cited in a letter to Milken:

“Michael, I believe we can really make a difference. We share the same objectives and I would be delighted if we could work together on this goal that we both have so much passion for. The

anniversary could be used to reach a large public audience who would mobilize Congress into action. You have already made a major impact and I have no doubt that with your commitment and passion we can make all of this a reality."

During the summer of 1996, Milken joined with philanthropist and industrialist Jon M. Huntsman, also a cancer survivor, to form the National Prostate Cancer Coalition (NPCC), an umbrella organization of survivor groups, research scientists, clinicians, associations and foundations. The NPCC's goal was to develop and implement a comprehensive advocacy agenda for prostate cancer, to reach out to at-risk communities and to give smaller advocacy groups a voice. Soon they had organized their constituent groups to start collecting hundreds of thousands of signatures on a petition to Congress for increased research funding.

On April 7, 1997, *Larry King Live* featured Milken; Ellen Stovall of the NCCS; ABC News commentator and cancer survivor Sam Donaldson; CBS [now CNN] news anchor and breast-cancer activist Paula Zahn; talk show host and cancer survivor Morton Downey Jr.; and actor Robert Urich, also a cancer survivor. (Downey and Urich have since passed away.) After each guest had talked about the need for action, King confronted the entire group asking, "Why don't you form an army of cancer survivors and march on Washington, D.C. to demand a cure for cancer?"

"Mad as Hell"

Although the idea of an event had been percolating since the 1995 Cancer Summit, that challenge from King helped focus the cancer advocacy community on the idea of a massive demonstration. Over the summer of 1997, the PCF's Rick Atkins worked closely with Stovall to line up more organizations behind the concept of "an army of cancer survivors." It would be a true grass-roots movement. They wanted all the different cancer organizations to get to know each other better so they would become a more-cohesive political force—a phenomenon that had been proven

by the breast cancer movement, which had brought dozens of scattered groups under a unified umbrella.

On October 23rd, Milken, Stovall and Sam Donaldson returned to *Larry King Live* along with model Cindy Crawford, whose brother died of leukemia; tennis star and children's cancer advocate Andrea Jaeger; and figure skating champion Scott Hamilton, who had survived testicular cancer. They used the opportunity to announce a March on Washington the following September. During the program, General Norman Schwarzkopf, a prostate cancer survivor and hero of the 1991 Gulf War, called in to offer support. He was named honorary chairman of the March.

Schwarzkopf was blunt: *“When the American people see how woefully underfunded cancer research is, they will be mad as hell. I’m going to be at the March and I challenge every other cancer survivor and every other American to be there with me.”*

These were stirring words; but it takes a lot of money to organize 600 groups and half a million people in 200 cities for a coordinated and effective effort. Estimates of the cost ranged from five to ten million dollars. The situation reminded Milken of 1993, when he kick-started the growth of prostate cancer research with a \$25-million grant from the Milken Family Foundation rather than wait until enough smaller contributions had been collected. Now, in 1997, he was too impatient to wait for hundreds of organizations to gear up their fund-raising even though the March was designed to be a grass-roots movement. So he persuaded fellow PCF board member Sidney Kimmel, founder and chairman of the Jones Apparel Group and a longtime philanthropist, to join him in committing most of the money needed to assure that the March would go forward. Smaller contributions came in later from several pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies and other groups.

Coast to coast

During the months leading up to the March, Atkins and Stovall recruited the “army,” bringing together hundreds of cancer

The PCF played a leadership role in organizing **The March: Coming Together to Conquer Cancer**. In September 1998, 150,000 people representing 600 cancer organizations gathered on the National Mall in Washington to demand increased federal funding for cancer research. Hundreds of thousands more rallied in 200 cities across America. In the five years after The March, federal funding of cancer research increased nearly 70 percent.



Sherry Lansing, chairman of Paramount Pictures Motion Picture Group (left); Ellen Sigal, Ph.D., founder and chairperson of Friends of Cancer Research (second from left); and Mike Milken join a young marcher at a Lincoln Memorial candlelight vigil the night before The March to remember those who had died from cancer.



“NO MORE CANCER!”



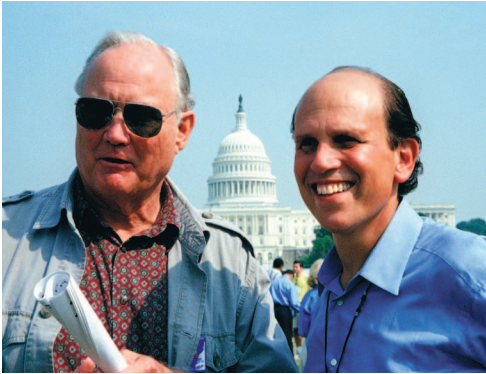
“It is our commitment today that our children will not remember cancer. For those children and the children of future generations, let’s get on with finding a cure for cancer and let’s do it now.”

– Mike Milken

“I’ve been waiting a long time to say this—Hello Washington! Hello America! Remember where you were today.”

– Breast cancer survivor Dani Grady after riding her bicycle across the country from San Diego.





General Norman Schwarzkopf and Mike Milken at The March. Schwarzkopf said:
"When the American people see how woefully underfunded cancer research is, they will be mad as hell."



Longtime philanthropist Sidney Kimmel joined with Mike Milken to provide the majority of funding for the event. Kimmel has funded cancer research centers across the U.S., including Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia and San Diego.



Anna Barker, Ph.D., a scientist and corporate executive who later became deputy director of the NCI for Strategic Scientific Initiatives, led the effort to harness the energy created by The March and accelerate the cancer research process.

“NO MORE CANCER!”



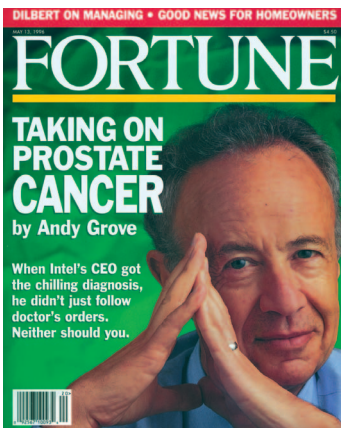
Vice President Al Gore told marchers: *“We want to be the generation that wins the war on cancer. Some people still say it’s impossible to find a cure. A hundred years ago, people said that about smallpox.”*



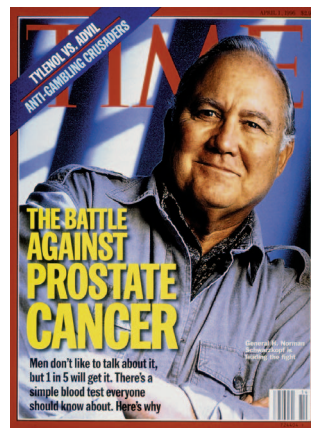
The PCF sponsored a 1995 Working Meeting on Standards to encourage faster release of oncology drugs. Emil Frei, M.D., physician-in-chief emeritus at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, summed up the meeting: "We have formed the basis of a major change in clinical trials and a major improvement and acceleration of progress in cancer treatment."



In January 2004, Prostate Cancer Foundation Chairman Mike Milken addressed a crucial National Cancer Institute roundtable convened to refine America's national strategy for reducing the burden of cancer. The roundtable developed what the NCI's Director called "a wealth of substantive solutions."



FORTUNE Magazine/Time Inc.



Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

PCF efforts to increase public awareness of prostate cancer got a boost in early 1996 when two prominent prostate cancer survivors were featured on the covers of national magazines.

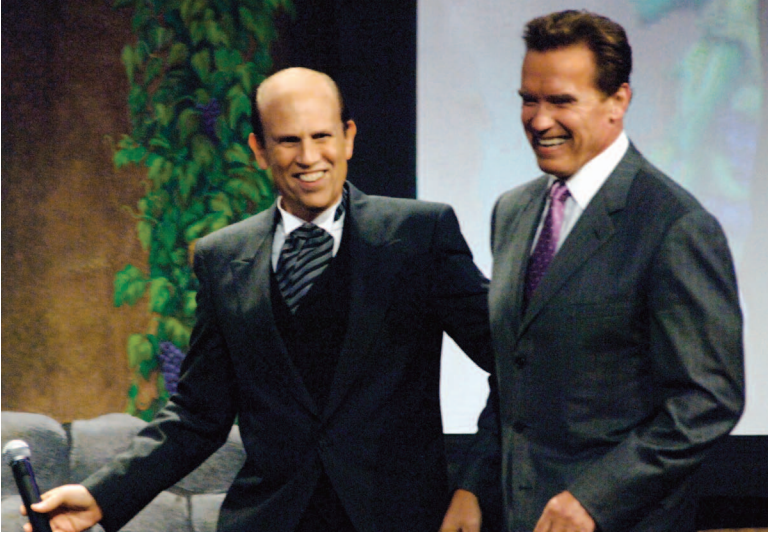
“NO MORE CANCER!”



At the 2005 Milken Institute Global Conference, Mike Milken and Dr. David Brailer, National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, discussed the future of medical research and how patients may be diagnosed and treated in the coming decades. Milken and Brailer are leading advocates of digitizing medical records and laboratory data.



The Global Conferences of the Milken Institute, an economic think tank, have increasingly focused on medical research issues. Nobel laureates Paul Boyer and Steven Chu with panel moderator Mike Milken.



California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger joined PCF Chairman Mike Milken after the 2005 Milken Institute Global Conference at a charity dinner to raise money for medical research and youth programs.



Stuart "Skip" Holden, M.D., PCF medical director.



Howard Soule, Ph.D., former PCF chief science officer.

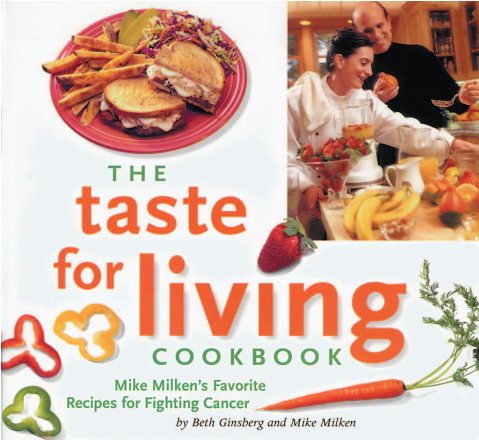


Leslie Michelson, PCF vice chairman and chief executive officer.

“NO MORE CANCER!”



At Lake Tahoe, Mike Milken and chef Beth Ginsberg introduced *healthful Taste for Living* cookbook recipes to a tough audience—kids.



As a result of his advanced prostate cancer diagnosis, Milken radically restructured his diet so he could enjoy his favorite dishes with low-fat, soy-based ingredients in place of traditionally high-fat foods. He and Beth Ginsberg co-authored a best-selling cookbook.

groups, plus survivors, scientists, government officials, healthcare providers and other concerned citizens. With the growing use of the Internet, word quickly spread across the country that something very important was going to happen on the National Mall in September 1998.

The PCF and other groups were determined, however, that the March should be more than a single day of quickly forgotten demonstrations. An integral part of the planning was to create an ongoing program that would help accelerate cancer research. This research arm of the March was led by Dr. Anna Barker, a scientist and corporate executive who later became deputy director of the National Cancer Institute for Strategic Scientific Initiatives. Barker headed an influential study of what needed to be changed in the cancer research process to get faster results, especially in the way clinical trials were conducted. This effort was part of the groundwork for the NCI's pioneering Leadership Roundtable meeting in January 2004 (see Chapter 14). Today, Dr. Barker is one of the leading proponents of interagency programs that can optimize the development and review processes for new cancer drugs and technologies.

By bike and by bus

Early in July 1998, breast cancer survivor Dani Grady of San Diego started "Conquer Cancer Coast to Coast," an 11-week, 3,600-mile bicycle ride across the U.S. Joined by other riders along the way, Grady planned to lead the group onto the Mall during the September 26th march. Other activists helped organize local rallies, marches, town hall meetings and vigils in cities across the country. Governors and mayors issued proclamations of survivor days.

On July 15th, a large, PCF-sponsored van pulled up to the east front of the U.S. Capitol to offer prostate-cancer and breast-cancer screenings to members of Congress. Aside from the public service of the screenings, it turned out to be an effective way to raise the PCF profile. As luck would have it, a rare joint session of Congress was held that day to hear a speech by the visiting

President of Romania. Most members of Congress and many of their spouses attended, assuring a steady flow of visitors to the van. First in line was Ann Simpson, the wife of former Wyoming Senator Alan Simpson. Each visitor received literature about plans for the March on September 26th.

Beginning on September 25th, marchers across the eastern half of the U.S. piled onto buses bound for Washington. (One devoted busload of women from Alabama traveled 14 hours non-stop, attended the cancer march all day, and then turned around to return home.)

Early that Friday evening, Vice President Al Gore and Tipper Gore held a reception for several hundred March organizers and participants in a tent on the grounds of the Naval Observatory, the Vice Presidential residence. Gore invited Milken, Atkins, Kimmel, Stovall and a few others into the residence to discuss the event and he soon agreed to speak the next day.

An inextinguishable candle

Later, as the sun eased below the western end of the Mall, tens of thousands of cancer survivors gathered at the Lincoln Memorial for a candlelight vigil to honor the memory of those who had lost their lives to cancer. After an interfaith service, there were brief speeches by General Schwarzkopf, Scott Hamilton, Andrea Jaeger and other celebrities. Following a musical performance, the Reverend Jesse Jackson rose to speak. He began softly, then gradually raised his booming voice to exhort the gathering:

“Music is a universal sound that gets our attention. Cancer is a universal pain that wipes out lives. And yet dreamers will not surrender to cancer. WE WILL OUT-DREAM, OUT-WORK, OUT-RESEARCH, OUT-FIGHT! We will conquer cancer because our minds are made up. Tonight we march for public policy, new priorities; we march for our basic rights, the right to live, the right to breathe, the right to build, the right to grow, the right to family.”

Other moving comments came from less-famous March participants. As people stood holding candles, one woman said she was a survivor of more than 10 recurrences of cancer, but she believed she was “a candle that cannot be extinguished.”

The next morning, more than 100,000 more people arrived, most by bus, and crowded onto the Mall. Helene Brown, a PCF board member, honorary life member of the American Cancer Society, and self-described “political oncologist” at UCLA’s Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, turned to PCF executive director Rick Atkins. *“I told you for months this event was going to backfire, that it would never happen because you were dealing with a motherhood and apple-pie issue—people don’t congregate around motherhood and apple pie. I have just one thing to tell you—I was wrong.”*

The Mall was dotted with white tents housing cancer education and prevention displays. In one tent, several of the speakers and performers autographed a poster commemorating the March. In addition to Mike Milken, the signers included former U.S. Senator and presidential nominee Bob Dole; and recording artist Graham Nash of the group Crosby, Stills & Nash. Milken later recalled the irony:

“Think back to 1969. A young Robert Dole from Kansas is giving his maiden speech in the U.S. Senate, the ultimate bastion of American tradition. That same year, Graham Nash, with defiant long hair, is performing at Woodstock before a crowd of half-dressed young people bent on strengthening a counter-culture opposed to the Establishment that Dole represents. Dole had won two purple hearts in World War II; the Woodstock crowd vehemently opposed the Vietnam War. But there was Nash on the Mall telling me, ‘I never thought I’d be in such agreement with Senator Dole, much less signing the same document.’”

King Hussein of Jordan, who would lose his life to cancer just a few months later, had planned to speak but was not well enough to do so. His wife, Queen Noor, attended to him in a VIP tent.

Other tents provided ice water and shelter from the heat for the marchers. Some were staffed by oncology nurses and doctors.

Children were not forgotten amid all the serious events. In one corner of the Mall, kids were enjoying a supervised play area with face painting and other games. Most memorably, a Children's Wall near Constitution Avenue, built at Milken's request as a memorial to cancer's youngest victims, was filled with poignant remembrances—a favorite toy, a good-bye poem, a pair of tiny sneakers or a picture of a loved one. Little children came and brought remembrances of a brother or sister lost too soon. Almost everyone who stopped at the wall walked away in tears.

Let's take the Hill!

As the formal program began under a baking noonday sun, Vice President Gore tossed his suit jacket aside, rolled up his sleeves and told the crowd, *“We want to be the generation that wins the war on cancer. Some people still say it is impossible to find a cure. A hundred years ago, people said the same thing about smallpox.”*

“We've established a beachhead,” said Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa; then he turned and pointed up at the U.S. Capitol. *“Now we have to take the Hill!”* Emphasizing that sentiment, representatives of the National Prostate Cancer Coalition announced that they were delivering 750,000 signatures urging Congress to increase research funding.

Stressing a grander message, PCF board member and former Los Angeles Rams football star Rosey Grier shouted, *“If we use our voices together, we can start a mighty roar that will be heard worldwide.”*

After pedaling across the Mall—the last lap of her cross-country ride—an excited Dani Grady bounded up the steps of the speakers' platform hoisting her bicycle over her head. *“I've been waiting a long time to say this—Hello Washington! Hello America!”* Echoing Henry V at Agincourt, she added, *“Remember where you were today.”*

Singer Aretha Franklin electrified the audience with some gospel and soul standards, and promptly wrote a \$15,000 check to help with the March expenses.

The crowd greeted speaker after speaker—Schwarzkopf, Tipper Gore, Queen Noor, Senator Connie Mack, ABC political analyst Cokie Roberts, Sam Donaldson and several more—with chants of “No More Cancer!” and “Yes, We Can!” At the side of the platform, an American Sign Language interpreter signed the speakers’ words for the hearing impaired.

Finally, the PCF chairman moved to the microphones. “My name is Mike Milken and I am a cancer survivor.” The crowd yelled encouragement while one group near the front hoisted placards reading **FAMILIES FIGHTING PROSTATE CANCER**. “*You make history today,*” Milken continued. “*Today we are united to defeat cancer. Today in Washington we think back to our parents, our grandparents and generations of Americans who fought to make this country free and give us a better life. We think back to generations of Americans and scientists who have rid us of smallpox and polio. My father had polio but he died from cancer. It’s our commitment today that our children will not remember cancer. For those children and the children of future generations, let’s get on with finding a cure for cancer and let’s do it now.*”

Dr. Joel Nelson, a prominent urologist, was one of several Johns Hopkins doctors who brought their families from Baltimore to be part of the March. “It’s not often that you’re involved in something that has that kind of magnitude. As a scientist and physician who takes care of patients with cancer, I was really inspired. It made me think about what we’re capable of. I knew then that all that stands between us and success is ourselves saying, ‘Let’s get going.’ That’s what the March was all about.”

Keeping it going

The effects of the March are still being felt. In less than a year, Milken was invited to testify about cancer funding before the

U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services and Education Appropriations. He asked Joe Torre, the manager of the New York Yankees, who had recently been diagnosed with prostate cancer, if he'd also like to make a statement to the committee. It was June, the middle of baseball season, and Torre couldn't be away from the team for long.

Milken agreed to pick up Torre in the morning at his suburban New York home and fly him to Washington, getting him back to Yankee Stadium for that night's game. On the flight to Washington, Milken was reviewing his prepared remarks with an aide. *"I don't think these numbers are right,"* said Milken. *"You see here where it compares cancer funding to the gross domestic product? There should be another zero after the decimal point."*

Torre, who was munching on a bagel across the aisle, looked pained. *"Geez, Mike, I don't know about those numbers. All I know about math is if I have more than nine guys on the field, I'm in big trouble!"*

Later that day, Milken and Torre were joined by former Senator Bob Dole. All three testified before the committee chaired by Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania. Milken reminded the committee about the previous year's March:

"How much firepower do we need to defeat cancer? Last fall, as part of 'The March: Coming Together to Conquer Cancer,' I suggested to Senators Connie Mack and Dianne Feinstein, at a hearing of the Senate Cancer Caucus, that the annual federal investment in cancer research be increased to \$10 billion. That's less than \$40 per American. It is a fraction of the cost of failure—the cost of treating the more than 100 million Americans currently living who are expected to get cancer.

"I believe that we can accelerate science. If we give cancer researchers the same kinds of tools that technology companies employ in accelerating scientific development, we can find a cure faster. We have talented people working on this inside

and outside the government. Let's give them the tools and the incentives to finish this job. Let's send a message to our best and brightest young scientists that cancer research is an exciting profession. Finally, let's show all these dedicated people that we share their sense of urgency."

Funding the future

Not long after The March, Milken hosted a meeting at Lake Tahoe to help coordinate the activities of several major funders of prostate cancer research—the National Cancer Institute, the Department of Defense, the American Cancer Society, the PCF and others. This led to a “Funders Conference” at the NCI in Washington that was attended by Richard Klausner, then the Director of the NCI, Andy Grove, Milken, Skip Holden, Rick Atkins, government officials from other agencies, and business executives representing major health sciences companies. This meeting and similar conferences over the next several years helped refine the NCI's prostate cancer strategy. It has been a novel and effective way to improve coordination of public and private efforts to advance research on an individual disease.