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# Patrick J. Kennedy: Brain studies: A new frontier for Rhode Island

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By Patrick J. Kennedy

Rhode Island is often touted as being perfectly sized to act as a laboratory to explore innovative ideas — an ideal incubator for drawing on individual institutions to push boundaries of science and technology that would otherwise be beyond their individual limits.

The Brown Institute for Brain Science drew experts from around America last Wednesday and Thursday to speak at a celebratory symposium, "The Future of the Brain."

The symposium, celebrating a decade of exploring the human brain at Brown University, demonstrates yet again Rhode Island's status as a leader in the emerging field of neuroscience.

Fifty years ago President John F. Kennedy, my uncle, challenged our nation's greatest minds to redefine the realm of possibility by exploring the vast frontier of space. By combining and harnessing the "brain power" of individuals working in diverse areas from biomechanics to psychology to computer science to neurology, America has set its sights on a new frontier of human exploration.

In doing so, we are poised to witness scientific and medical breakthroughs that will rival any we have seen in the last century. However, we need to address this challenge with the same urgency that put a man on the moon, discovered a vaccine for polio and unlocked the human genome.

Among the millions suffering from debilitating neurological disorders are thousands of our veterans — our nation's heroes — who return home with the signature wounds of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan: traumatic brain injury, loss of limbs and post-traumatic stress disorder. Worse still, last year more of our soldiers lost their lives to suicide than to a battlefield injury, which further underscores the urgency of the task in front of us.

Our resolve to help restore those injured in war (both physically and psychologically) can likewise lead to major advances in holistic restorative and rehabilitation medicine — improving not only the lives of wounded soldiers but millions of other Americans struggling with neurological illnesses, impediments and injuries.

Thus, the lessons learned about battlefield-related traumatic brain injury may lead to better treatment options of patients injured in automobile accidents. Unlocking the secrets of post-

traumatic stress disorder could be the groundwork for understanding a parent's battle with Alzheimer's or depression.

Rhode Island is uniquely positioned to emerge as a center of excellence in the study of neuroscience. The Brown Institute for Brain Science is a leader in nurturing collaborative studies of the brain across multiple disciplines. In July, our very own Bradley Hospital hosted a panel attended by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that brought together distinguished stakeholders in this field from our state government, research institutions, health-care providers and private companies. And the recent announcement of a \$15 million gift to Rhode Island Hospital to create the Norman Prince Neuroscience Institute exhibits the growing excitement and philanthropic interest in this area.

In addition to the scientific and medical breakthroughs that could benefit thousands of our state's citizens, the neurosciences can act as a catalyst for further economic growth already taking root in the Knowledge District, in Providence, as well as other areas across Rhode Island.

This is just the beginning of what can be accomplished by working together to advance the science and medicine in the neurosciences, while simultaneously enhancing Rhode Island's economic vitality. We are on the cusp of tremendous new discoveries in the neurological sciences. We need to muster the collective will of the leadership in our state to leverage the private and public resources that are essential to fulfill the promise of neuroscience inquiry, discovery and cures.

Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy, a Democrat, represents Rhode Island House District 1.