

Opinion: Olympics Aside, Boston is Already World Class

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News of the end of Boston's bid for the 2024 Summer Olympics was met in some quarters with comments that Boston is simply not a "world-class city" and was not up to the task of playing on the world stage. While I'm not exactly sure what defines a "world class city," every day I see evidence that Boston is indeed world-class and plays a major role on the world stage. Patients from around the world and around the corner seek advanced clinical treatment pioneered here in Massachusetts. Biotech, pharmaceutical and medical device companies locate and grow here in order to be at the center of medical research. Thousands of clinical trials — partnerships between our academic medical centers and industry — provide hope for thousands of patients and their families seeking a cure or a better quality of life.

Recently, the Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals and the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center launched the Massachusetts Clinical Innovation Gateway as a way to connect our hospitals with those seeking to partner on new research initiatives. It was telling that one of the first proposals was from a company in Israel.

Artist drawings in the Boston 2024 proposal rendered portions of the city nearly unrecognizable, with new athletic facilities, housing and roadways. Unfortunately, medical research in Boston in 2024 may also look quite different than it does today. Ten years of level or even reduced funding has eroded the National Institutes of Health's purchasing power by more than 25 percent. While federal investment in medical research here in the United States has stalled, others countries such as China, Canada, Australia and Japan have been investing heavily. Our ability to compete internationally and make the research advances that have been the hallmark of the past is in real jeopardy.

Leaders of our Congressional delegation who have become the strongest advocates for increased federal funding for medical research understand the importance of this funding for the state, for our national competitiveness, and for achieving cures for our most intractable diseases. Here at home our leaders at the state and local levels and in the business community also understand the importance of medical research. Recent bipartisan action on research funding proposals in Washington offers hope that this issue can rise above partisan politics and real progress can be made. These actions and the upcoming U.S. presidential election offer an opportunity to redouble our efforts to document the impact that medical research has on our nation and its citizens and recommit the United States to maintaining and enhancing its leadership position.

The prospect of rubbing elbows with athletes and celebrities, witnessing the best in sports, and showcasing Boston to the world was enticing. But we can't lose sight of what we have now, research advances made here in Boston are improving the lives of millions of patients and families from across the world, far outliving the impact any two-week event could ever have.

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