Port Allen, La. (AP) — Only $1.8 million of the National Cancer Institute's $1 billion 1981 budget found its way to Louisiana, a state that "probably" has the highest rate of certain cancers in the world, a Louisiana State University researcher said Monday.

And the United States "is behaving like an underdeveloped country in cancer research," added Pelayo Correa of the LSU Medical School.

The U.S. is waiting for others to come up with something, and Louisiana government hasn't spent much on cancer research.

The Legislature conducted hearings on the problem recently "but nothing came out of it," he said.

Gov. Dave Treen recently vetoed a bill to help push a study on whether cancer can be linked to the petrochemical industry — but he said he would try to come up with funds before the fiscal year ends.

Dr. Correa apparently was chosen as a speaker to contrast with last week's Press Club of Baton Rouge speaker, John Sheppard, a board member of the environmental activist Ecology Center.

Sheppard said that study after study indicates that there is a definite link between cancer and the petrochemical industry.

Correa said interpreting data on cancer deaths and the environment can be tricky at best, Correa said.

For example, a correlation has been found between the number of cancer deaths and income taxes and anyone would agree that paying high income taxes is not a cause of cancer, he noted.

What he did stress is that researchers know for sure that if you smoke, your chances of getting lung cancer are 70 times as great as the chances for a non-smoker.

"When someone smoking a cigarette comes up to me and talks about air pollution, I refuse to listen," he said.

More research must be done and that's why more money is needed, he added.

The cancers in which Louisiana probably leads the world are those involving the lungs, the mouth, the esophagus, and larynx.

While acknowledging that those cancers are those which could be caused by breathing polluted air, there is no proof, he said.

"Many things have been the scapegoat and there has been bickering and fighting but we must work together and do more research to find the cause and effect because we do not know the causes of cancer in Louisiana."