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GRAVELLE TABLES BILL FOR NATIONAL DEMENTIA STRATEGY
Canada must plan for catastrophe coming for 1.1 million and their caregivers

OTTAWA -- Today Nickel Belt MP Claude Gravelle introduced legislation for a national dementia strategy, invoking the memory of his mother and over 500,000 Canadians already ravaged by Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

Gravelle, joined by NDP Health critic Libby Davies (Vancouver East), NDP Seniors critic Irene Mathysen (London-Fanshawe) and Alzheimer advocates, profiled his mother Leona's story, painfully familiar to Canadians whose numbers will double to 1.1 million plus their caregivers within a generation.

"Long before her death at 83 in 2003, besides the first forgetting of appointments and things on the stove, it deteriorated to forgetting to take medication, to language loss, changes in mood and behaviour and loss of initiative," Gravelle recalled. "We were helpless watching a mild-mannered woman at times turn aggressive and seeing part of her true self slip away. My dad was the partner who also suffers, learning to sleep with one eye open."

"Existing federal programs, research funding, support and income assistance pale in comparison to the enormous and rapidly escalating health, economic and social impacts of this devastating disease," said Debbie Benczkowski, interim CEO of the Alzheimer Society of Canada. "Dementia is a non-partisan issue. On behalf of Canadians with dementia and their families, we urge all parties to work together to act on Mr. Gravelle's bill."

"The Conservative government needs to take immediate action and provide comprehensive long term and community care options to support those living with chronic illness," stated Davies. "A national dementia strategy is desperately needed, and should be a cornerstone in guiding the implementation of long term and community care programs."

"With a rapidly expanding seniors' population, 9.8 million Canadian seniors by 2036," investments for programs and research into seniors' health and well being must happen now" said Mathysen. "Inaction is not an option. The federal government can and must take the lead."

According to the Alzheimer Society's 2010 landmark report *Rising Tide: the Impact of Dementia on Canadian Society*, without government action dementia costs to the Canadian economy will increase tenfold, from \$15 billion a year to \$153 billion a year over the next 30 years.

"Alzheimer's is not part of normal aging," Gravelle said. "Together, let's champion a national dementia strategy."

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