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Advancing Public Policies to Improve Care and Quality of Life for Frail Elders, Seriously Ill People and Family Caregivers

There is an elephant in America's living room. It is the discussion we need to have about the ways we age and die in this country. We know that far too many of the 2.4 million Americans who die each year spend their final months and days in pain and in fear, most often in hospitals or nursing homes, while family caregivers often sacrifice their own health and financial well-being to meet the costs of their health care and living expenses.

As bad as the situation is now, the swelling population of chronically ill and elderly Americans and shrinking numbers of caregivers – particularly nurses, nursing home staff, and home health aides – make clear that just two decades from now, these will seem like the good old days.

More startling, except for the kitchen-table conversations within our own families and our personal worries about our aging parents and our own future health and longterm care needs, this national crisis is not discussed. And it needs to be. Soon. The truth is, this is one crisis we CAN fix. Innovative, cost-effective services and systems can be put in place to ensure that all of us – frail elders, people with advanced illness at any age, and families of those who are dying – can experience a safe and comfortable last chapter of life.

The Reclaiming the End of Life Initiative (RELI) is designed to use the 2008 presidential primaries to focus national attention on this crisis. Through a series of statewide grassroots forums with citizens, we will first get our communities talking. Voter participants from these forums will then take the issue to the candidates and to the media covering the primaries. At the same time that these engaged citizens are asking questions at every public appearance by presidential hopefuls, we will be providing the candidates' campaigns with information to educate them about the crisis and its potential solutions, so that the campaign trail conversations can be substantive and constructive. Reclaiming the End of Life will stay strictly focused on the issues and will not endorse any party, candidate or legislation.

The result will be a national conversation that we hope will translate into meaningful public policies that begin to solve the problems and avert a greater crisis.

We are pleased to have the support and partnership of a number of national and New Hampshire-based organizations as we move the Initiative forward. Volunteers from communities where the forums will be held (see locations on fact sheet) are also signing up to help. More information – including opportunities to volunteer or to support the Initiative financially – is available at our website:

www.ReclaimTheEnd.org

There is no more time to pretend the elephant isn't there. Our families and our neighbors desperately need to have the national conversation begin. Now is the time; New Hampshire is the place. Together we CAN and WILL "reclaim the end of life."



2.4 million people die in America each year. By far the majority are frail elders.¹

20 percent of Americans die in Intensive Care Units. 50-60 percent die in hospitals and 25 to 35 percent in nursing homes.² Only 20-30 percent die at home, despite the fact that surveys have repeatedly shown that is where we want to be when we die.³

By 2030, the numbers of Americans 65 and older will nearly double, going from roughly 35 million in 2000 to about 71.5 million.⁴

The number of Americans 85 or older is also projected to double during that time, from 4.2 million in 2000 to 9.6 million in 2030.⁵

New Hampshire is aging more rapidly than America's population as a whole. The census bureau predicts a rise of residents 65 and older of 138 percent – compared to a national average of 104 percent – between 2000 and 2030. New Hampshire residents 65+ will total almost 25 percent of the state's total population by 2030.⁶

In 1990, the average ratio of caregivers per elderly person was 11 to 1. If current patterns continue, estimates indicate it will be 6 to 1 by 2030 and 4 to 1 by 2050.⁷

Nearly half of Americans who live to 65 will enter a nursing home before they die.⁸

Already, according to a Congressional study, more than 90 percent of nursing homes have too few workers to care for patients.⁹

By 2010, nearly half of all nurses will be over age 50, exacerbating what is already a national nursing crisis.¹⁰

¹ CDC: Death Rates By Age Group

² Society of Critical Care Medicine 2006

³ A 1999 Harvard Public Opinion Poll found that 71 percent of Americans would prefer to die at home. A 2002 Harris Interactive Poll found that 86 percent of Americans believe that people who have a terminal illness would most like to receive end-of-life care at home.

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Census Interim Projections: Change in Total Population and Population 65 and Older, by State: 2000 to 2030

⁵ U.S. Bureau of Census: Interim Projections of the Population by Selected Age Groups for the United States and States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2030

⁶ U.S. Bureau of Census: Population Pyramid of New Hampshire.

⁷ International Longevity Center and the Schmieding Center for Senior Health and Education 9/6/2006

⁸ JAMA 2000 Nov. 15 2841(19)

⁹ Ref. NY Times, 9 of 10 Nursing Homes in U.S. Lack Adequate Staff, a Government Study Finds, Robert Pear 2/18/2002

¹⁰ HRSA Projections by Divisions of Nursing



The tentative date of NH Presidential Primary is January 22, 2008.

In 2003, the year before the 2004 primary, candidates collectively spent 320 days in New Hampshire. With more candidates and primaries in both parties, the number of visits will be significantly higher this year.

Reclaiming the End of Life will hold 8 Citizen Forums in spring and summer 2007 – in Concord, Hanover-Lebanon, Keene, Laconia, Littleton-Lancaster, Manchester, Nashua, and Portsmouth-Exeter.

From these, a report will be published, fact sheets and issue white papers and candidate questions drafted, and campaign briefings conducted. Concurrently, citizens will be asking candidates questions, and journalists, pollsters, and debates will focus on these vital issues.

The Initiative will be strictly non-partisan, and will not advocate for any party, candidate or particular piece of legislation. We are using the political process as a tool to build awareness of the problem and solutions, but the Initiative is absolutely not political.

We have the opportunity to make New Hampshire a seedbed of ideas and a model for innovation and best practices to improve quality of life for our residents and for the rest of the nation.

From New Hampshire, we can change the world for frail elderly, people of any age with advanced illness, and caregivers. To get involved, contact:



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