

MINUTES  
**SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Wednesday, February 15, 2012  
**TIME:** 3:00 P.M.  
**PLACE:** Room WW54  
**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Lodge, Vice Chairman Broadsword, Senators Darrington, Heider, Vick, Nuxoll, Bock, and Schmidt  
**ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** Senator Smyser

**NOTE:** The sign-in sheet, testimonies, and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

**MINUTES:** **Chairman Lodge** called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m. and welcomed guests, including former **Senator Joe Stegner** who was in attendance.

**SCR 112** **Stating Findings of the Legislature and Acknowledging the Seriousness of Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias in Idaho by Endorsing the Idaho Alzheimer's Planning Group (IAPG).** **Senator Joyce Broadsword**, District 2, introduced **Mike Berlin** with IAPG who thanked **Senator Broadsword** and **Senator Schmidt** for cosponsoring **SCR 112**. He advised that this resolution supports IAPG's comprehensive approach toward educating the public about Alzheimer's Disease and other Dementias, collecting and analyzing state wide data related to current and future needs for Alzheimer's patients, families and caregivers and recommended programs and strategies for addressing those needs.

**Mr. Berlin** stated that over the past 15 months IAPG established a Steering Committee made up of experts including researchers, current and former legislators, clinicians, educators, caregivers and representatives from local and national organizations such as AARP, the Alzheimer's Association, and the Commission on Aging - all of whom are volunteering their time for the cause.

He noted in particular, the work of **Dr. Barry Cusak**, Chief of Geriatrics, VA Hospital, Boise, ID, who is one of only five geriatricians in the State; **Dr. Sara Toeys**, Director, Boise State Center for the Study of Aging, who is involved in a variety of issues related to services for the elderly; and **Dr. Troy Rohn**, Professor of Biology, Boise State University, who is the preeminent researcher in the State of Idaho with regard to brain pathology of Alzheimer's and other chronic brain diseases.

**Mr. Berlin** presented a supporting letter from the national Alzheimer's Association (see Attachment #1), and a fact sheet prepared by the Alzheimer's Association (see Attachment #2). He stated that Alzheimer's is a non partisan issue that everyone should be concerned about. It is the only major cause of death in this country whose mortality rate is continuing to go up—all other major disease mortality rates are going down. He advised that 41 percent of Idahoans living in skilled nursing facilities have moderate to severe dementia and Idahoans currently diagnosed with Alzheimer's could fill Bronco Stadium. Once there is a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease it is a fatal disease; there is no cure. It is financially devastating to both the state and family members as it takes years to die and caregivers are left mentally and physically exhausted. He noted that the fastest growing age segment in the State of Idaho is people 85 years of age and over. Support of caregivers in order to keep Alzheimer's patients safely at home would greatly reduce the cost.

**Mr. Berlin** stated IAPG obtained a grant from AARP to assist with data collection efforts. The Legislature's backing will assist IAPG in applying for other grants to fund recommendations that might come from data collection efforts, as well as provide legitimacy to the organization in approaching state agencies. Data collected to date indicates a need to expand education. IAPG's next step is to establish a Speaker's Bureau related to "Brain Health," and to continue to expand a statewide email list receiving a quarterly newsletter.

**Mr. Berlin** introduced **Dr. Cusak** who related typical stories of patients and families. He stated one thing they all have in common is shock when a diagnosis is made. He reviewed the progression of Alzheimer's which begins slowly with trouble remembering words, names, and recent events, and causes significant physical deterioration and suffering over the years. He advised the disease is very costly both individually and socially and emphasized that maintaining well being of caregivers is of prime importance. He stated many spouses become depressed in dealing with the additional burdens of caring for an Alzheimer's patient. He recommended a novel, "Still Alice," which emphasizes the early terror and state of denial of the Alzheimer's patient.

**Dr. Cusak** indicated pharmaceutical treatments available today do not deal with the pathogenesis of the disease and benefits are often not discernible. Providing education and support for the caregivers can delay the placement of the patient in an institution and add up to significant savings for the family and the state. He stated that risk is higher with family members and the only thing recognized today as a preventive benefit is physical exercise.

**Dr. Toevs** continued the presentation by discussing opportunities in Idaho to improve the spectrum of prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and caregiver support services for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. She stated this is a statewide issue and is becoming front page news. There is a pressing need for access to information and affordable services. She noted Idaho has a tremendous record of looking at Medicaid Home and Community-based Service Waivers that support caregivers and emphasize trying to keep individuals in their homes and communities as long as possible. She also noted that we have a huge population of Idahoans who do not fall into Medicaid that need the support and reinforcement from their community to help them maintain their role as a caregiver.

**Dr. Toevs** stated that IAPG is not only active in research, but has people on the ground developing caregiver supports that will enable individuals to remain in their homes as long as possible. It is IAPG's contention that the development of a statewide plan will help them enhance quality of life, assure coordination of care, and use tax dollars efficiently.

Supporting documents related to this testimony have been archived and can be accessed in the office of the Committee Secretary (see Attachment #3).

**Chairman Lodge** thanked all the presenters for the presentation and their volunteer work in this area.

**Vice Chairman Broadsword** requested that **SCR 112** be sent to the floor with a do pass recommendation.

**Senator Nuxoll** asked how the endorsement of a statewide plan by the Legislature, without providing any funding, would benefit the IAPG. **Vice Chairman Broadsword** advised that the Legislature's show of support for a statewide plan will give the Steering Committee the ability to go out and find grants and other funding. The hope is that they will come up with a plan that will have strategies the State of Idaho can use in dealing with people who already have Alzheimer's and are on Medicaid. It can save the state money in the long run. **Senator Nuxoll** also asked if there is any way to stop Alzheimer's deterioration. **Dr. Cusak** responded that recognizing and treating associated things like depression will improve function and make life more manageable, but there is no effective drug therapy to stop the deterioration. He added that drugs may slow down the trajectory of the decline but do not address brain activity.

**Senator Schmidt** related that an adult daycare health program for dementia patients, which has been operating in a hospital in his community, is considering closing because they cannot afford to keep it going. He is hoping this is the type of problem a state wide plan will address - how can we change policy to make appropriate application of efforts and provide appropriate care in the community.

**Senator Heider** questioned if the incidents of dementia are going up more rapidly because of the baby boomers and why people with dementia are living longer in Idaho than other areas of the country. **Mr. Berlin** stated that the baby boomers are definitely impacting the age group where dementia and Alzheimer's begins. Baby boomers are choosing to retire in Idaho where the cost of living is cheaper. He is not sure why people live longer in Idaho than other areas of the country, but does not feel the environment is a factor.

**Senator Lodge** stated she recently read an article indicating Alzheimer's could be caused by a virus. **Dr. Rohn** indicated new data suggests it is actually being transmitted between neurons. It is not really a virus.

**TESTIMONY:** **Peggy Munson**, AARP Idaho State Volunteer President and Geriatric Nurse, spoke in support of **SCR 112**. She stated that because finding solutions to this health problem is very important to AARP, it has invested time and money in IAPG to help carry out focus groups across the state.

Supporting documents related to this testimony have been archived and can be accessed in the office of the Committee Secretary (see Attachment #4).

**TESTIMONY:** **Dr. Rohn** indicated he has studied Alzheimer's disease for 15 years, but today, as a citizen of Idaho, he asks the Legislature's support for **SCR 112**.

**TESTIMONY:** **Louise Berlin**, a founding member of IAPG, related a family experience with Alzheimer's and requested support for **SCR 112**.

Supporting documents related to this testimony have been archived and can be accessed in the office of the Committee Secretary (see Attachment #5).

**MOTION:** **Senator Heider** moved, seconded by **Senator Nuxoll**, that the Committee send **SCR 112** to the floor with a do pass recommendation. The motion carried by voice vote.

**ADJOURN:** **Chairman Lodge** recognized a group of youth from the Early Childhood Development Program at the College of Western Idaho who attended the meeting. There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 4:24 p.m.

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Senator Lodge  
Chairman

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Lois Bencken  
Secretary