

Gingrich Testifies on Need for Research

When former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich speaks, Congress listens. They don't always do what he says, but they listen.

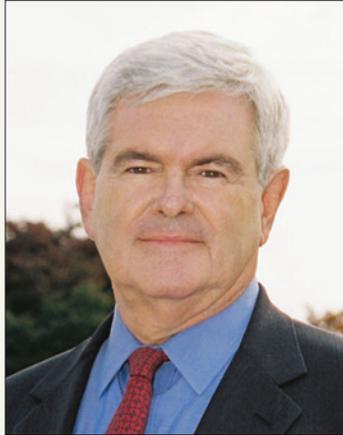
Last month Gingrich testified before a Senate Special Committee on Aging hearing titled, "The Way Forward: An Update from the Alzheimer's Study Group." In his testimony, the former Speaker highlighted the huge financial impact Alzheimer's disease has on the American economy. He also emphasized the small amount currently spent on research into the disease's causes and treatments.

Gingrich told the Committee that:

- In 2005 Medicare spent \$91 billion on beneficiaries with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and expects to spend \$189 billion by 2015.
- Alzheimer's disease is expected to cost Medicare and Medicaid \$19.89 trillion between 2010 and 2050.
- A five-year delay in the onset of the disease would save Medicare and Medicaid \$8.51 trillion between 2010 and 2050.

Given these statistical realities, Gingrich outlined a sweeping plan to address the Alzheimer's crisis. He said, "Today much more money is spent simply treating the complications that arise from Alzheimer's than is invested in developing a cure, better treatments or improved approaches to care." He urged the Committee to support a larger investment in science, coordination of research, better translation of breakthroughs from bench to bedside, and a better system to reward caregivers.

Gingrich's written remarks outlined the Alzheimer's Study Group's (ASG) report, "A National Alzheimer's Strategic Plan," which includes a 16-step Alzheimer's Solutions Project.



Newt Gingrich

Increased funding for research, including basic research, is a major focus of the report. In particular, the ASG calls for spending \$1 billion a year on Alzheimer's disease research.

The former Speaker also called for: 1) the creation of a special Congressional committee with unique authority to appropriate funds solely for Alzheimer's disease, and 2) the appointment by the President of a chief executive officer to lead the Alzheimer's Solutions Project.

In advocating for such large sums of federal research funding, the former Speaker focused on the amount of money the federal government will spend on Alzheimer's disease in the next 40 years. Gingrich told the Committee, "If there is already a projectable \$19.89 trillion dollar [*sic*] federal expenditure for Alzheimer's over the next generation, then the scale of research investment ought to be measured against the money it will save rather than against other federal expenditure it would crowd out in a static budget."

Other members of the ASG—including Sandra Day O'Connor, former U.S. Supreme Court Justice; Bob Kerry, former U.S. Senator; and Maria Shriver, First Lady of California—joined Gingrich at the hearing. Both Gingrich and Kerry serve as co-chairs of the ASG. ASCB member Harold Varmus is also a member of the ASG.

To read "A National Alzheimer's Strategic Plan: The Report of the Alzheimer's Study Group," go to http://alzstudygroup.org/Portals/0/National_Alzheimers_Strategic_Plan.pdf.

To watch a video replay of the hearing, go to www.senate.gov/fplayers/CommPlayer/commFlashPlayer.cfm?fn=aging&st=xxx. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

