



For Immediate Release  
November 5, 2011

Contact: Lorren Sandt  
[Lorren@CaringAmbassadors.org](mailto:Lorren@CaringAmbassadors.org)  
503-632-9032

### **Congress Stirred to Save Millions of American Lives and Consequent Billions in Future Healthcare Costs**

**Oregon City, OR,** The Viral Hepatitis Testing Act of 2011 was introduced in both Houses of Congress today potentially saving billions in taxpayer dollars. In the House, this bi-partisan effort is lead by Congressman Dr. Bill Cassidy (R, LA) and Congressman Mike Honda (D, CA). Senator Kerry is leading the effort in the Senate. The Act establishes, promotes, and implements hepatitis B (HBV) and hepatitis C (HCV) screening and testing programs at State, local, territorial, and tribal levels. This important legislation aims to increase the knowledge of disease status in those chronically infected - from the current estimate of 25% for HCV; and 35% for HBV to 75% by 2016.

“Viral hepatitis is a silent killer,” said Senator Kerry. “Many people don’t even know they have hepatitis B or C until it causes liver damage or even cancer years after the initial infection. Today as many as 5.3 million Americans are battling this disease, but we still don’t have a national strategy to back them up in their fight. This bill will strengthen awareness, prevention, and treatment, hopefully stopping this silent disease from spreading further and claiming more lives.”

The cost implications of HBV and HCV today and in the future are enormous. Without effective intervention, annual medical costs for HCV alone are expected to rise from \$30 billion to \$85 billion per year in just the next 15 years. As this population ages and the disease progresses, government payers will bear the majority of the financial impact. For HBV, “More than \$1 billion is spent each year for hepatitis B-related hospitalizations.” Much of this future cost is avoidable with earlier diagnosis and intervention. “Even in tough economic times we need to spend money to save lives, said Lorren Sandt, Executive Director, Caring Ambassadors Program (CAP), Oregon City, OR, “The window of opportunity to change the outcome of this epidemic is closing fast. Baby boomers have been living with this silent killer for decades, they need to be diagnosed now and linked to appropriate counseling and care. If not diagnosed, the dire national predictions of a 59% rise in liver cancer and the tripling of the current death rate will become a needless reality for millions of Americans.”

“I have worked for many years, through numerous bills and letters, to champion the issue of viral hepatitis to the forefront,” said Rep. Honda. “Today’s updated bi-partisan legislation, along with strategic investments in public health and prevention programs, will save billions of dollars and

the lives of tens of thousands of Americans. Today, we sound the alarm – louder than ever before – on this silent killer. Today, in the name of over five million Americans who suffer from viral hepatitis, we break the silence and we fight back.”

“As a doctor who treats liver disease, I know the harm caused by viral hepatitis and the importance of increased screening and knowledge of the liver disease,” said Dr. Bill Cassidy. “Millions of Americans and American families are affected by liver disease. Billions of taxpayer dollars are spent on hospitalizations that could have been avoided by earlier detection. This bi-partisan legislation will help identify and treat hepatitis before it’s too late – saving lives, money and hopefully stopping this killer.”

XXX

### **About CAP**

The mission of the Caring Ambassadors Hepatitis C Program is to improve the lives of people living with hepatitis C through advocacy, information, and support. CAP is a public charity based in Oregon City, Oregon. For more information on hepatitis C visit: <http://www.HepCChallenge.org>