

Senator Luann Ridgeway

Capitol Report

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## Breast Cancer Awareness Month

As you may have guessed from all of the extra pink you have seen in stores the last few weeks, October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. This time is set aside to educate people, both women and men, about breast cancer risk factors, the importance of regular exams and the diagnosis and treatment of a disease that claims thousands of lives in the U.S. each year.

According to the [American Cancer Society](#), an estimated 182,460 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in the United States in 2008 alone. That's more than six times the entire population of Liberty! Breast cancer is the most common cancer among American women, except for skin cancers, and the chance of developing invasive breast cancer at some time in a woman's life is about one in eight, or 12 percent. Approximately 40,480 women will die from breast cancer just this year. The odds are extremely high that you or someone you know has been affected by this disease.

As one of the 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States myself, I fully understand the importance of working to find a cure for a disease that claims so many lives. I also understand the importance of the unconditional love, support and encouragement that is necessary to get you through the days, weeks and months in the fight against breast cancer. If you are a friend or family member of someone diagnosed with this disease, your role is more vital in that individual's recovery than you will ever know.

While breast cancer unfortunately cannot be prevented, steps can be taken to decrease your risk and help increase the odds that, if breast cancer occurs, it is caught at an early, more treatable stage. Regular self-exams, mammograms and visits to your doctor can all help with early detection. I urge you to make this extra effort—someday it may save your life, like it saved mine.

With this form of cancer, assuming it is caught in its early stages, it simply isn't the death sentence that it used to be. Many women refuse to go in for regular check-ups out of fear of the diagnosis. I encourage you to get beyond your fear. It's so much easier to become totally cancer-free if diagnosed early. And there's hardly a better feeling than getting confirmation of a clean bill of health following your check-up.

I just passed five years of being cancer-free. That is considered a milestone, as the chance of any reappearance of cancer is quite rare beyond the five-year window. It's just another reason to count my blessings and to help others survive by promoting early detection!

— Senator Luann Ridgeway