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**A Weekly Column for the
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November Is National Alzheimer's Awareness Month

It was recently announced this year that Alzheimer's disease is now the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics, it is estimated that more than 72,900 Americans died of Alzheimer's disease in 2006. And with an enormous population shift of 78 million aging baby boomers in the United States, Alzheimer's disease is predicted to strike 10 million of these boomers — more than 12 percent of that population. With these shocking statistics, it is appropriate to bring attention to this escalating epidemic and designating November as Alzheimer's Awareness Month does just that.

This devastating disease has been around for thousands of years, but that doesn't make its occurrence any less of a tragedy for family and friends. In general, people are living longer than ever before thanks to advances in modern medicine and the way we live our lives. This results in hundreds of millions of people living into their 70s, 80s, 90s, and beyond. Sadly, it's a fact that the risk of Alzheimer's increases with age. According to the Alzheimer's Association's national statistics, approximately 1 percent of 65-year-olds have the disease, 10 percent of 75-year-olds suffer from Alzheimer's, and 20 percent of 85-year-olds are affected by the disease.

Twenty-four million people across our planet already have this fatal disease. That astonishing number is expected to double over the next 20 years and then double again 20 years later to more than 100 million people with Alzheimer's disease. Not only does this disease touch family and friends of loved ones who have Alzheimer's, it affects our communities.

After reading these shocking statistics, many might think that finding a cure for the disease is hopeless. However, scientists understand how Alzheimer's attacks the brain and they have many ideas on how to stop its progression.

The disease gradually progresses through different parts of the brain, slowly attacking and killing brain cells. It starts in the part of the brain where memories are first formed. Over many years, the disease destroys this part of the brain — making it more difficult to form new memories. After that, the disease spreads to other regions of the brain, killing brain cells and compromising function wherever they go. This causes the different stages of Alzheimer’s. The progression of Alzheimer’s is slow and steady and takes place over an average of eight to 10 years time. It is relentless and for now, incurable.

Helping family, friends, and neighbors in their effort to better understand this disease will reduce the stigma surrounding it, improve care for those who have it, and even help fight for a cure. To learn more about Alzheimer’s disease, including more on how the disease works, treatment options, and the latest news and research, visit www.AboutAlz.org. And if you have questions or comments about any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.mo.gov.

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.

