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WASYLYCIA-LEIS LAUNCHES BILL TO EXTEND CAREGIVER TAX CREDIT TO SPOUSES OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

WINNIPEG – New Democrat Health Critic Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North) today launched a bill to bolster the family income of persons living with disabilities by extending the ‘caregiver tax credit’ to the spouses of persons with disabilities.

“This will ease some of the pressure on the spouses of persons living with disabilities who, up until now, have not been eligible to claim the caregiver tax credit,” says Wasylycia-Leis. “Spouses, in particular, are stretched and stressed from the pressure to provide their loved ones the time, care and financial support they need and deserve. Yet no one is caring for the caregivers.”

A quarter of Canadians provide informal care to a family member or friend with a serious health problem every year. More than 75 percent of these caregivers are women. A 2009 study estimates the costs in personnel alone to fulfill the care provided by these family caregivers at \$25 billion. Without the needed supports, one third of caregivers have run up added expenses, 20 percent have lost at least one month’s work and 15 percent have had to cut back on hours of work.

“Sooner or later, we’re all called on to help in some way and with the approaching wave of aging baby-boomers, we can’t continue to ignore the needs of family caregivers,” says Wasylycia-Leis. “It’s been almost a decade since the Canadian Caregiver Coalition identified a national home and community care program as caregivers’ top priority. The problem is it’s not a government priority.”

A lack of financial security is the number one hurdle facing persons with disabilities and their families. Those living with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty as other Canadians, yet strategies leading toward self-sufficiency and independence are a low government priority. So too are measures to support caregivers both economically and psychologically.

“The MS Society of Canada congratulates Judy Wasylycia-Leis for her leadership in launching this private member’s bill to allow spouses access to the caregiver tax credit” says Deanna Groetzinger, vice-president, government relations and policy for the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. “It is an issue for which the MS Society has been advocating for several years. Spouses are the ones who most often provide care and should be recognized. Several provincial governments have initiated caregiver tax credits or allowances, and we urge the federal government to follow their lead.”

Wasylycia-Leis also has proposals before Parliament calling on the government to:

- make the Disability Tax Credit fully refundable for persons with disabilities; and
- adjust the qualifying requirements of the Canada Pension Plan – Disability provisions to accommodate the variable and, in some cases, degenerative characteristics of chronic diseases.

Wasylycia-Leis announced her bill today at the home of Lynn and Wayne Waterman, one couple of the many who would benefit from its passage. They were joined by representatives of the MS Society of Canada, the Parkinson Society (Manitoba) and Alzheimer Society of Manitoba. Also supporting the extension of the caregiver tax credit to spouses are Tourette Canada, Epilepsy Ontario and the Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation.

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