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American Heart Month

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey, Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize American Heart Month and to acknowledge the tireless advocacy of the staff and volunteers of the American Heart Association, and the organizations in my home state of New Jersey and across the country. They work this month, and year round, in the effort to raise awareness of heart disease, stroke, and other cardiovascular diseases. The Association is leading the charge in increasing visibility of American Heart Month through coordinated campaigns, such as National Wear Red Day on February 5 and Go Red For Women.

American Heart Month provides a critical platform to promote public awareness and heart-healthy lifestyles. The American Heart Association focuses on seven health factors and behaviors that increase the risk of Cardiovascular disease, or CVD. These areas of prevention include not smoking, physical activity, healthy diet and body weight, as well as managing cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the leading cause of heart disease and stroke is uncontrolled high blood pressure. Outlining these areas gives

us the knowledge to focus our prevention efforts in the fight against CVD.

The statistics speak for themselves. CVD is the leading cause of death nationally and globally. One in three American deaths is caused by CVD, a disease which claims the life of an American every forty seconds. To fully understand what that means, in 2013, the most recent year for which data is available, CVD killed over 800,000 people in America. In addition to the lives it claims, over eighty-five million Americans are currently living with CVD or its effects. CVD also has a real impact on our national economy. Annually, the economic cost of CVD is over \$316 billion. \$1 of every \$6 spent on health care in this country is spent treating CVD.

There is good news. The efforts of the advocates are working. The mortality rate from heart disease has fallen by 38 percent. This is encouraging, but there remains so much more to do be done.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the good work being done in my home state in the fight against CVD. The American Heart Association and the American Stroke Association are funding nineteen Founders

Affiliate research awards in the state of New Jersey.

In my own Congressional district, the Meridian Health Foundation's "Women's Heart Fund" –focused on promoting heart health in Monmouth and Ocean Counties–has worked to promote heart health awareness and raise funds for heart health at the Meridian Health System including the Jersey Shore University Medical Center, Riverview Medical Center, K. Hovnanian Children's Hospital, and Bayshore Community Hospital.

Each year, the Fund selects and supports a cardiac initiative. In 2015, the Fund supported the Community of LifeSavers program. Working together with the American Heart Association, Community of LifeSavers equips everyday people with the skills to perform CPR. Over 5,000 students from seventeen schools have been trained, at no cost to the schools or students, since the program's inception.

I am honored to have served as co-chair of the Congressional Heart and Stroke Coalition since the 113th Congress. This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Coalition's establishment and our numbers have grown to over one hundred members of Congress. Over the past twenty years this bi-cameral, bi-partisan Coalition has served as a resource for all members of Congress and worked to advance federal policies that raise the quality of life for individuals with heart disease.

The American Heart Association and the Coalition work in partnership to raise awareness of CVD and provide those of us making funding and policy decisions with the tools and information to address the problems most critical to those affected by CVD. Congressional briefings, such as the

upcoming "Is Medical Research Meeting the Needs of Women? A Discussion of GAO's Report and Its Policy Implications" on Wednesday, February 24, are a component of the work we do to educate policy makers.

Heart and stroke patients, as well as their loved ones and caregivers, need vocal advocates on Capitol Hill to ensure access to quality care and treatments. We have a duty to see that programs aimed at combating CVD, as well as medical research for prevention and treatment of stroke and heart attacks are supported appropriately at the federal level.

As we look forward to promoting awareness during American Heart Month, it is important to remember that the work continues year round. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my colleagues who are fellow members of the Congressional Heart and Stroke Coalition and thank them for their efforts. I encourage those members who have not yet joined the Coalition to do so. The Coalition will continue to work with the Association throughout the year in the fight against America's number one killer.
