

AggingCare®

WWW.AGINGCARE.COM

Spring 2015

CONNECTING CAREGIVERS

➔ Susan Collins

AGING AMERICA'S
ALLY ON THE HILL

The newly-appointed
Chairman of the Senate
Special Committee on Aging
reaches across the aisle
to help aging adults



**A New
Nursing
Home
Alternative
for Aging
Veterans**

**LESSONS
FROM THE
HOSPICE
WARD**

A 4-day ordeal
leads to a
life-altering
revelation

**Expert
Q&A:
Dental
Health
for
Aging
Adults**

**The
Miracle
of 'Finding'
Lost Memories**

LOOK INSIDE: HOW TO GET YOUR FREE CAREGIVING GUIDES

Aging. America's

★ ALLY ON THE HILL ★



“S” stands for Senator, not Superwoman, but Susan Collins is known for taking heroic action on behalf of America’s 43 million older adults. The Republican politician was recently appointed Chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, a group she’s been a member of for nearly two decades.

BY ANNE-MARIE BOTEK

CARING FOR THOSE WHO CARE FOR OTHERS

Family caregivers couldn’t ask for a better advocate than Collins, who is currently in her third Senate term. Her native state of Maine boasts the oldest population by median age in the country.

“As our nation’s older population expands significantly, new challenges are emerging,” she says, “including ensuring that our family caregivers have the resources and support needed.”

In an era of broken promises and political scandals that have hit older adults especially hard, it’s reassuring to know that aging Americans and their caregivers have at least one advocate on the Hill. “Caring for an older family member can be a series of ‘36-hour’ days that are physically, emotionally and financially draining,” says Collins. “There is very little ‘time off’ for someone who is caring for an older loved one.”

Collins’ legislative record is refreshingly balanced. She adheres to the core values of her party, but refuses to stray into the realm of extremism, and her penchant for promoting cross-aisle compromises is a welcome change of pace in politics.

Topping Collins’ to-do list as the new Chairman: increasing funding, support and awareness for Alzheimer’s disease; easier access to home care services for older adults; and better care for older veterans.

A PLAN OF ACTION FOR ALZHEIMER’S

Collins’ Alzheimer’s advocacy has deeply personal roots; several of her relatives have grappled with the condition. “Far too many families have experienced the pain of Alzheimer’s and know the helpless feeling of watching the progression of this terrible disease,” she says.

As co-author of the legislation that created the National Alzheimer’s Project Act (NAPA), Collins has been part of the core group of legislators urging the government to adopt a more coordinated offensive against Alzheimer’s. Particularly as it pertains to developing a cure.

Recently, she helped fight for the \$72 million that was set aside for Alzheimer’s research and caregiver support programs in the Fiscal Year 2015 federal funding bill.

“Despite the enormous amount of money our nation spends caring for individuals with Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia, we are spending just roughly one quarter of one percent of that amount on research,” Collins laments. “Finding better treatments will not only save lives, it will save money.”

Avoiding political gridlock is key to keeping the NAPA on track to achieve its goal of developing an effective treatment for Alzheimer’s by 2025. As a member of the Bipartisan Congressional Task Force on Alzheimer’s Disease, Collins is used to extending a friendly hand across the aisle to craft policies that protect families affected by Alzheimer’s. Her most recent efforts in this arena call upon Congress to double the amount of funding allotted to Alzheimer’s research in 2015.

A LONG-TERM CARE REVOLUTION

Since becoming a senator, Collins has put her political muscle behind the informal aging-in-place initiative that’s transforming long-term care in America. Her efforts have been repeatedly recognized by the National Association for Home Care and Hospice. For Collins, increasing older adults’ access to home care services is a win-win for both American citizens and the government. “Home care



Senator Collins with President Barack Obama in the Oval Office.



Susan Collins uses her political power to make America a better place to grow old.

is not just the preferred choice for most patients, it is also the most cost-effective,” she says.

For instance, Medicare must shell out approximately \$2,000 each day for a beneficiary to stay in a hospital and \$559 each day they are in a nursing home. By contrast, the typical cost to Medicare for home care services is just \$44 per beneficiary, per day.

One of the biggest barriers to wider adoption of home care services is the fact that a doctor is required to prescribe them in order for an older adult to receive financial assistance from Medicare. Collins’ Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act calls for a revision to this policy that would allow physician assistants and registered nurses to make these decisions as well, enabling a greater number of older adults to have access to Medicare reimbursement for home care.

IMPROVED CARE FOR AGING VETS

The VA healthcare system had a rough 2014. Rocked by a waiting list scandal

that continues to draw legal scrutiny, the program is in the midst of a major overhaul.

But one often overlooked area of need within the VA is how to provide effective healthcare services to the more than nine million veterans who are 65 and older. Collins argues that allowing veterans to receive care at non-VA hospitals and providing them with better telehealth alternatives would go a long way towards improving their well-being.

Mental health conditions such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are another major area of concern for the growing population of aging American veterans.

“We are only beginning to understand how previous traumatic experiences, in the military or otherwise, affect mental health in later life,” says Collins, “but it is clear that more must be done to provide veterans the access they need to mental health services.”

A PERSONAL QUEST

Another notable political figure, Rosalynn Carter, is famous for declaring, “There are

only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers.”

Collins’ personal experiences have made her well aware of the truth of this statement, which is why she’s so passionate about addressing issues affecting family caregivers. “There are likely very few families that have not been affected in some way by an older loved one who required long-term care. My family is no exception,” she says. “We can do more for family caregivers by identifying their support needs, giving them information they need, particularly in crisis situations, and assisting them in maintaining their own health and well-being.”

With legislators like Collins, always looking for ways to “do more” for family caregivers, things are beginning to look a bit brighter for our aging America. 