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## Resisting the Reality of Cancer Prevention

By Bill Couzens, Founder Less Cancer a Campaign of Next Generation Choices Foundation

**WHEN MY SISTER ANNE DIED** six years ago, she was one of many individuals in my life who had fought the battle. Of the four homes I frequented on the block where we grew up in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, three of the mothers died of cancer before I was out of high school. My mother was the oldest to go; she died at 69.

Some of the children of those families have also faced cancer. The first died from lung cancer in her early 40's. My sister had pancreatic cancer. I had a non-cancerous tumor on my spine called a *schwannoma*, also known as an acoustic neuroma, when I was in my 40's. One dear childhood friend who lived nearby died of inflammatory breast cancer at the age of 40. Sadly, cancer was a very present member of our community.

Like so many, I experienced a great deal of loss while I was relatively young. The pain I felt when Anne died, however, was different. It was complex and hit me at my level; she was part of me.

Grief and loss placed me in auto drive and plunged me into an affair with cancer facts, figures, research, evidence, and the thoughts of cancer experts from around the world. I asked myself, was cancer to be an expected stage of life for everyone?

The result of my search led to a path that was entirely unexpected. It developed into a passionate calling that has informed my life. With few resources, but lots of faith, I founded the Next Generation Choices Foundation which has become home to the Less Cancer Campaign.

Despite Richard Nixon's efforts in 1971 to launch the War on Cancer, the problem has not been solved and in fact has multiplied. Nearly a lifetime and countless billions later, identifying and treating cancer has become its own economy. While I am so grateful that so many researchers are looking for the cure, we are living in time of unprecedented increases in the number of friends and family battling cancer or dealing with the issues that cancer survivorship brings.

In my small Virginia town of just over 600, there are at least 5 people I can think of (myself included) within a thirty-mile radius who have acoustic neuromas/schwannoma, a rare and often benign tumor. The small country day school that my children attended had less than 300 students, and yet within one year – or what seemed like a matter of months – our community lost three parents to cancer. Friends in the area have young children fighting cancer – and others have lost their children to the disease.

Unfortunately, the experience of my life and my community are not unique – it in fact is increasingly becoming the norm.

We live in a time when cancer has become so commonplace that the news of new cases seems almost expected. Everyone I know is involved with a walk, a run, or a ride to support cancer research. We as a culture are working every day to find new ways to fund big dollar cures and cancer treatments. While I applaud those efforts, and would have done anything to see my sister and mother cured, the larger issue is that little if anything is being done in the area of cancer prevention.

We as a society are willing to race for a

cure, but are not willing to work diligently to eliminate or reduce the exposures that cause it.

Last spring when the American Cancer Society (ACS) came out with a new campaign called "More Birthdays," they also made use of the Less Cancer phrase in a variety of ways. While at some level I was flattered, my concern has always been that their application strays drastically from our Less Cancer message.

The use of our name speaks to its relevance, but the powerful and well-financed American Cancer Society is ultimately changing the focus of the Less Cancer Campaign that was established years earlier.

The goal of Next Generation Choices Foundation and the Less Cancer Campaign has always been cancer prevention. If truth be told, the ACS "More Birthdays" campaign, as I understand it, is not about less cancer, but more treated cancer, since age is the greatest risk factor.

I recognize that both organizations care passionately about the cause, but it is vitally important to recognize that each is approaching it from a completely different direction. The ACS "More Birthdays" campaign as I understand it supports more treated cancer, and the goal is to provide more funds to cancer treatment organizations to support the development of better therapies.

I am compelled to speak about this issue because the American Cancer Society is one of the wealthiest non-profits working today. They are well funded by all

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### THE REALITY OF CANCER PREVENTION Continued

the cancer treatment and cure corporations in addition to other large companies. They have become the standard – and a comfortable and easy choice as far as corporate contributions are concerned. Their goal, however, is different than ours. The primary goal of the Less Cancer campaign is found in its name: Less Cancer. Our message is focused on identifying environmental risk factors and lifestyle choices with an emphasis on reducing exposures and decreasing incidence of cancer.

When I wrote Sheffield Hale, Chief Counsel for the American Cancer Society, on July 20 of 2009, I wrote that I was surprised that they had adopted this campaign slogan that appropriated the well known brand of the Less Cancer campaign. I was especially concerned that they were utilizing the message of Less Cancer to mean something different than what we had intended, and as a result, changing the meaning of our Less Cancer message. My interest in reaching out was to ensure that the good work of each organization was protected by clearly defining unique goals.

Our small organization has done very well raising awareness for cancer prevention around the world. Our desire is to

continue that work. Less Cancer is not about more birthdays, but more birthdays cancer free in a world with less cancer.

The American Cancer Society is in a different league. Their funds will ensure that the Less Cancer message is used to their advantage – even if it is at the expense of another organization working the problem from a different angle. If they don't redirect their advertising efforts, soon people will recognize the Less Cancer message as the moniker of an organization that is working toward more birthdays, and more treated cancer – instead of less cancer.

Just today I was given the opportunity at a bank drive thru window to buy a candy bar with the profits going toward a cancer cure. David Servan-Schreiber, MD, PhD, author of *Anticancer: A New Way of Life* is a clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and cofounder of the Center for Integrative Medicine. Dr. Servan-Schreiber's book discusses concerns about sugar as a food that feeds cancer. So why are we selling candy bars to fund the cancer cure? It doesn't make sense. We as a society can't seem to move away from the "break and fix" model of healthcare.

The American Cancer Society More Birthdays campaign can now be found on

an iPhone application. A person can somehow blow into their phone and birthday candles on a cake will be extinguished. While I am sure there is a recipe for healthy birthday cakes out there, the jury is still out on the cancer risk associated with cell phones. With this in mind, Maine's state legislature could soon vote on a bill making their northeast U.S. state the first to require that cellular phones carry warnings of a possible link between mobile phone radiation and brain cancer.

#### When does it stop?

- When do we make a change in our behaviors and our environment and ask those wearing the cancer cure hats to really take on cancer prevention?
- Why do we make choices based on a lack of evidence – and assume that a lack of science translates to safe?
- When do we move from the financial model and actually work from a place not motivated by profit – but rather prevention?

Profit models should not dictate healthcare. Our society has lost its grip on the problem because of greed and a general malaise and acceptance of cancer as a fact of life. Real progress will only happen when we address issues in behavior and choices. For example, there are foods that are not only not nutritious, but in some

cases toxic. So when do we get the backbone to push back, make the tough choices, and do what is right – and not only what is profitable?

According to a *Scientific American* article (2-17-2010), about 133 million Americans have one or more so-called chronic conditions, which can include obesity and diabetes. According to a House bill introduced in July 2009 and currently in committee, there is a need to increase overall federal funding for healthcare. Wayne Giles, director of the CDC's Division of Adult and Community Health, notes that some 75 percent of U.S. health care spending goes toward "treating patients with chronic disease." As the authors of the bill hasten to point out, "The vast majority of these diseases are preventable." These conditions also account for about 70 percent of deaths in the U.S.

The Less Cancer campaign refuses to accept these facts as fate – and is working for a day when communities and families cease to expect that people they love will be diagnosed with cancer. We are working so that the Anne's of the world don't just celebrate more birthdays, but celebrate them healthy, having never experienced cancer in the first place. ■

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Extensions of Remarks *By the Honorable Frank R. Wolf of Virginia* February 24, 2010

## Next Generation Choices Foundation: Working to Lessen Cancer

Mr. WOLF. Madam Speaker, like so many Americans, my family and I have been touched by cancer. I have worked over the years in Congress as a member of the Congressional Cancer Caucus as well as my service on the Appropriations Committee to support measures to help fight cancer, including historic increases in research funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). I have always believed that ensuring adequate funding for medical research on diseases such as cancer is an important priority for the federal government.

There is another important component in the fight against cancer being lead today, Madam Speaker, by Bill Couzens, one of my constituents from Middleburg, Virginia. He heads a grassroots nonprofit organization – the Next Generation Choices Foundation – that he founded over six years ago, to build awareness for cancer prevention by reducing environmental exposures both known and suspected to be linked with cancer. After the loss of his sister and several close friends, he felt the need to create an organization that would focus on the root causes of the worldwide cancer epidemic and increase awareness on ways to reduce exposures and choices linked with human health and the environment. He says he learned that there are healthy choices that can be made by individuals and communities to work toward a world with less cancer, including nutritional food options for families.

Next Generation Choices in turn has formed the Less Cancer Campaign, which has grown to become a worldwide leader in cancer prevention awareness, with over 10,000 members, friends, and fans on Facebook. The reach of the Less Cancer Campaign has been wide; numerous other organizations have followed its lead and collaborated to fan the flame for cancer prevention around the globe. These combined efforts have raised awareness for Less Cancer, not just here in America, but around the world.

The Less Cancer and new Healthy Town campaigns are working to help guide communities and individuals on understanding the importance of making strong choices, and providing information on options and resources available to assist them in making healthy decisions. While most often pointing to options for the consumer, the organization in some rare cases has provided food cards, information for healthy food choices, and even shoes for children who need to get out and move, run and play.

While Mr. Couzens personal experience inspired his passion to help lessen the grip of cancer on society, he also understood the importance of working with scientists and physicians who have a depth of work in evidenced-based science. Next Generation Choices board of directors includes Ronald B. Herberman, M.D., founding director of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, associate vice

chancellor for cancer research, Hillman professor of oncology, and professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Dr. Herberman is an internationally recognized tumor immunologist who has made major discoveries in his field and has fostered the application of this information to novel approaches in cancer therapy, diagnosis and prevention. The phenomenon of natural killer (NK) cell-mediated cytotoxicity against tumors was first discovered in Dr. Herberman's laboratory at the National Cancer Institute in the early 1970s. In addition to his pioneering investigation of NK cells, Dr. Herberman has played a leading role in multiple areas of tumor immunology.

Other leaders in science and medicine on the board are Maryann Donovan, Ph.D., the director of the Center for Environmental Oncology, and Thomas M. Sherman, M.D., a gastroenterologist. The board also includes professionals in industry and business. Greg Lam and John Couzens both contribute from their years in business and nonprofit management. Miles M. O'Brien is a 26-year broadcast news veteran. Based in New York City, he owns a production company that creates, produces, and distributes original content across all media platforms. For nearly 17-years he worked as a correspondent, anchor, and producer for CNN based in Atlanta and New York. At various times he was CNN's science, space, aviation, technology, and environ-

ment correspondent. Also on the board is Veronique Pittman, a trustee of The Rainforest Foundation and Round Hill Hotels and Villas, and a partner with Rainforest Native, which imports fair-trade ecological products from the Amazon rain forest. In addition, she sits on the Leadership Council of the Green Schools Alliance and is an Advisory Board member of the Sustainable Acai Project and Global Goods Partners.

Next Generation Choices, Less Cancer, and Healthy Town are closely associated with cancer prevention, but also work to reduce all illnesses associated with human health and the environment. As Mr. Couzens has said, "When communities and individuals work to make healthier choices, great strides toward preventing cancer and other illnesses including heart disease, diabetes, and obesity can be made. By educating people and unifying individuals and programs – transformation will occur for the next generation."

Madam Speaker, the fight against cancer will take the work of individuals, communities, businesses and governments, and we salute the effort of Bill Couzens and Next Generation Choices as they raise awareness on ways we can all be involved to help prevent cancer. ■