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Rep. Johnson's statement on hepatitis C

LITHONIA, GA – “Over the past year, I have been on a robust course of treatment for hepatitis C (HCV), a virus that affects more than four million Americans. I am pleased to announce that my therapy is progressing well. My physician is encouraged by my response to treatment and expects complete success eradicating the virus.

I hope that my disclosure will provide others suffering from HCV with confidence to speak out and educate the community about this illness. Through clinical trials and medical research, we must always seek new, more effective treatments.

I plan to use my position as a public figure to raise awareness of the consequences of this infection and let others fighting hepatitis know that it is possible to succeed and excel while battling this disease.

The causes of this disease are many, but in the end it does not matter how someone contracted the virus. Like so many millions of others, I was infected many years without ever knowing how I contracted it.

In fact, more than half the people who have hepatitis C don't know how or when they contracted it. And many are fearful of the treatment regimen that impacts your life in unusual ways. Having come through a long course of treatment, I want to send a strong message that a cure is possible but you must be tested and treated.

I will be working with the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) to help educate my colleagues and the public to learn more about this largely misunderstood disease. It is treatable, but we must devote the will and resources it deserves in light of the urgent need.

Though this infection has caused me some discomfort and frustration, it has in no way affected my ability to legislate and serve my constituents. My record of attendance at votes and in committee meetings is outstanding. I have passed three major bills in this year alone. As Chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Courts and Competition Policy, I have led an active and effective committee. And as Southeast Regional Whip in the House leadership I played a significant role in rallying my colleagues' support for historic health reform.

Today, I also announce that I will co-sponsor legislation offered by several of my colleagues in October, 2009 – H.R. 3974 – which would establish, promote, and support a comprehensive prevention, education, research and medical referral program for viral hepatitis infection.

It is a testament to the 111th Congress that we have men and women willing to stand up for average Americans and their families who have been impacted by hepatitis C and related illnesses. It is also gratifying that this is a bi-partisan bill because disease respects no socio-economic status, party or political philosophy.”

Rep. Johnson's physician, Dr. Maria Sjogren of Walter Reed Army Medical Center

"Congressman Johnson can be an inspiration to thousands of people who suffer from this illness. He has been a model patient, sticking with his course of treatment even when it was most difficult. His determination shows that people suffering from hepatitis can live normal lives and continue to be productive citizens."

Martha Saly, Director of the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR)

"On behalf of the entire chronic viral hepatitis community, we offer Congressman Johnson our support, prayers, and encouragement," said Saly, who was treated for hepatitis C in 1999 and cleared the virus. "Congressman Johnson's announcement shines a much-needed spotlight on a public-health issue that has historically resided in the shadows. We are hopeful that Congressman Johnson's announcement will help spur greater awareness about the need for increased prevention, detection, and treatment of chronic viral hepatitis B and C."