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**Elaine Alquist, Willie Brown and Kim Belshé Convene
Purple Ribbon Panel, Task Force on Alzheimer's**
Group to determine state response to impending Alzheimer's epidemic

SACRAMENTO, Calif., Sept. 21, 2009 — Former California Assembly Speaker and San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown is among members of a Purple Ribbon Panel and Task Force starting work today to develop a California State Plan for Alzheimer's, a disease estimated to double among Californians by the year 2030. The state has not effectively addressed policies and practices regarding Alzheimer's since 1987.

Brown will be joined on the Purple Ribbon Panel by a host of key opinion leaders including Lloyd Dean, Jonathan Fielding, Leeza Gibbons, Robert Lagomarsino, Kirsten Mangers, Arnold Millstein and Fernando Torres-Gil. Convening on World Alzheimer's Day, the eight-member Panel and State Alzheimer's Plan Task Force will address how California can best respond to this impending epidemic. The 22-member Task Force will be composed of representatives from the health care and provider community, researchers, academicians, family caregivers, local and state government representatives, elder law experts and members of the Alzheimer's Association.

A report released by the Alzheimer's Association in February predicts that by 2030, the number of Californians age 55 and older living with Alzheimer's disease will double to 1.1 million.

"The data indicates the economic and human costs of Alzheimer's disease will be insurmountable for our State if we don't act now. Procrastination is simply not an option. We need to take advantage of the opportunity we have today to make choices that will alleviate the worst impacts of a disease that's already unimaginably tragic," said Senator Elaine Alquist, author of SB 491.

The Task Force will convene subcommittees and community meetings throughout the state, including outreach to populations in rural areas and to different racial and ethnic communities, to gather input on a number of critical issues that will be exacerbated by an alarming rise in Alzheimer's numbers. Brown and other Purple Ribbon Panel members will

work to maintain high awareness of Alzheimer's in California, enhance implementation of recommendations stemming from a completed plan and serve as advocates for long-term policy change.

Among the issues to be examined is end-of-life care. Alzheimer's disease is fatal, and the Alzheimer's death rate is growing at a dramatic pace — jumping by 220 percent from 1994 to 2003. Meanwhile, advances through research allow earlier diagnosis of Alzheimer's, which creates greater opportunity to address end-of-life care with people in the beginning stages of the disease. However, the same research has not been successfully utilized by the medical community, resulting in limited referrals for end-of-life care such as hospice.

Other issues currently unaddressed include:

- **Barriers to diagnosis and care among certain ethnic groups.** While overall Alzheimer's numbers will double among Caucasians and African Americans, the number of Latinos and Asian-Pacific Islanders in California living with Alzheimer's will triple by 2030. Under-reporting and diagnosis at a later stage of the disease often occurs among people of color and limits the effectiveness of treatment. Education, diagnosis and treatment can require new approaches in non-English speaking and ethnically diverse populations.
- **Increased need for caregiver support.** For every person living with Alzheimer's or a related dementia, two or three family caregivers provide assistance with day-to-day living. Several demonstration grants have produced positive results through funding for caregiver training programs. However, California lacks a comprehensive plan for addressing the needs of individual caregivers and those needs are rarely considered at the time of diagnosis.
- **Lack of geriatric training and specialization among healthcare professionals.** People 85 and older comprise the fastest growing segment of California's population. Almost half of these people now have Alzheimer's, likely accompanied by multiple chronic health conditions. Yet, in contrast with this demographic fact, relatively few healthcare professionals have training in dementia care and geriatric issues, let alone specialize in geriatric medicine.

The stakes are high. It's not just individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer's who are impacted – in fact, virtually every Californian could be affected by the disease, including:

- **Caregivers.** The Alzheimer's epidemic affects a rapidly growing number of family caregivers. Women, including adult children, teenagers and elderly spouses, bear most of the burden and account for 75 percent of all unpaid caregivers in California.
- **Employers.** California employers experience an estimated \$1.4 billion in lost productivity annually from full-time employed caregivers who miss work, reduce their work hours, quit their jobs or change their jobs to care for someone with Alzheimer's disease.
- **Taxpayers.** People age 60 and older with Alzheimer's or related dementia individually cost \$25,000 in Medi-Cal funding, as opposed to about \$10,000 for an individual not having a diagnosis of dementia. So a person with dementia is costing Medi-Cal 2.5 times more.

“The investment of time, skill and leadership by members of the Purple Ribbon Panel and Task Force can benefit the entire state and every California resident. The data report issued earlier this year demonstrates that knowledge is power. Today's meeting is the first day of that power being used to make a difference in how prepared California is in the face of an unavoidable and alarming rise in Alzheimer's cases,” said Mary Sundsmo, President, Alzheimer's Association, California Council.

The Panel and Task Force were created in response to SB 491 by State Senator Elaine Alquist (D-San Jose), with the February report amplifying the need for action. Partnering in the development of a State Plan are the Alzheimer's Association and the California Health and Human Services Agency.

Completion of the California State Plan for Alzheimer's disease is scheduled for late 2010. In early 2011, a series of policy briefings will be held to communicate the Plan's findings to the new governor, Legislature and other policy makers and leaders.

Financial support for the Plan is already in place. It was provided through a collaboration composed of The SCAN Foundation, The California Endowment, Archstone Foundation and The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation.

The Alzheimer's Association's five California chapters are part of the national Alzheimer's Association. The mission of the Alzheimer's Association is to eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research, to enhance care and support for all affected, and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. It is the largest private funder of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia research. For more information and to download a copy of *Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures in California: Current Status and Future Projections* from February, visit www.alz.org/cadata.