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NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR DIABETES BILL

THIRD READING

Speech by:
The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Monday, June 21, 2021

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: This is a very important bill and I do support Bill C-237, calling for a national framework and strategy on diabetes. I'm going to be very personal in my comments, building on the excellent speeches we've already heard. I'm going to start with the Nobel Prize-winning discovery of 100 years ago — that of insulin. What a great contribution Canada gave to the health of the world. Many Canadians have heard me say for decades that I believe scientists and artists are about 20 years ahead of the rest of us. They have a special makeup with an experimental curiosity to know more, find out more and help. That is a real gift. Sometimes we see both attributes and capabilities in one person, as with Sir Frederick Banting, who with Charles Best discovered insulin, and who went into the Canadian wilderness to paint with Canadian Group of Seven artist A.Y. Jackson. He executed quite remarkable paintings.

Now to the personal. Forgive me, I am going to be very personal in this. I do know that Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes are different diseases. My first husband, who died of a heart attack almost 17 years ago, was diagnosed with Type 2 some 10 or more years before he passed. I have to say he managed it expertly for years, but as you all know, diabetes and heart disease are connected. A year ago in early April, my granddaughter in the U.K., then 9, was diagnosed with Type 1. I have learned that there's no hereditary link between Type 1 and Type 2, so there's no link between the granddaughter and the grandfather she never knew. Her diagnosis was sudden and came as a real surprise. She's bright and athletic and had no prior symptoms.

I know many of us have had to deal with such surprises as partners, parents, grandparents and friends. In Zoe's case, she was rushed to King's Hospital London at the height of their COVID first wave. She was the only child in the whole pediatric wing of that esteemed hospital. Her father, who took her there, had to stay with her for the whole time, which was more than a week. Given COVID rules, her mother and sister were not allowed to visit at all. They were some very dicey days, and I am so blessed that she and her immediate family have the spirit, resilience and determination they do. Of course with COVID, I have not been able to see her or any of her family, save on Zoom or FaceTime, for over 18 months. However, I'm lucky we have the technology we do today. For my part, in the midst of my stress and anxiety through all this, I want to thank Senator Ravalia. He kindly heard me out in my state and underlined the research and the lead Kings was doing internationally, coupled with researchers here in Canada.

Since then, I have to say I am very proud of young Zoe. Just after her tenth birthday several months ago, she administered her insulin injection herself and is now on top of calculating the carbohydrates for her next meal — thus her insulin need, which she has to give herself 10 minutes before she eats, and on she goes. Early on, she instinctively knew when her sugars were too

high or too low and could do the finger pricks herself to confirm where she was at. She has declined an insulin pump for now, which really surprised me. However, in one of our long and wonderful two-person FaceTimes, she said:

Mama, I need to know how to do it without technology, in case technology fails. Then I will get the technology. That way, I'll know what to do.

I was pretty proud of her approach.

The personal aside, you can appreciate, as Senator Hartling said, how family experiences feed one's desire to dig deeper. They are in the U.K., I am here. I well know all the services my family has had there — and does have — and could not be more grateful or admiring. I know the depth of the medical, nutritional and psychological team Zoe's whole family has. I know her school hired a fully qualified nurse after her diagnosis. I hasten to say it was not just for her. With other children's needs, it seems Zoe's reality tipped the scales, for which I am a very grateful grandmother.

[Translation]

Let's talk about Canada now. I want to sincerely thank Kimberly Hanson from Diabetes Canada and our entire Manitoba leadership team at Winnipeg's St. Boniface Hospital. They provided a wealth of knowledge and vision. I am so impressed by what they do and that they do it with patience, skill, first-hand experience and compassion.

I also want to thank Senator Mégie, who sponsored this bill in the Senate. I thank Member of Parliament Sonia Sidhu, who sponsored the bill in the other place, for her leadership on Bill C-237, a bill that I wholeheartedly support. Her family and her community face huge challenges, and they are so fortunate to have someone like Ms. Sidhu making changes at the national level to address such considerable needs.

[English]

I support Bill C-237 fully. We do need a national strategy that gives equal access to research, funding, technology, diagnoses, information, equipment, awareness, treatment and more all across this country. The fact that equipment is not equally accessible across Canada amazes me. Why don't all Canadians get the support my Zoe gets in London? Why do some supports stop at 18 or the age of majority? When will we grasp that research funds spent now will pay for themselves later in treatments, lives saved or corollary impacts now and in the future? Will all those with diabetes be able to access the latest technology? I do know how that has changed since the days in the 1990s when John had to test his sugar levels with finger pricks. Zoe, in the 2020s, does hers with a reader, which goes to hers and her parents' phones.

This disease is a major health risk and determinant in Canada. It links to so many other diseases. Research between diabetes and COVID is in full swing. As Senator Mégie clearly outlined in her speech, we do know the connections to heart health, circulation,

vision and so many other conditions. Money spent on research and prevention, and for a cure, is absolutely critical. So too is making sure those findings and treatments are equally accessible across our country. Research entails patience, diligence, care, detail, compassion, teamwork and a long-term focus. Many people and policies only deal with short-term focus. In this case, both the long term and short term must prevail.

[*Translation*]

A national strategy is now essential and is a perfect way to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the massive contribution Canada made to research on this disease. I was naturally pleased to see funding for diabetes in Budget 2021, which will have a positive impact on people all across the country. I also want to thank all of the volunteers who are raising money to expand that research, which is so needed.

[*English*]

I want my Canada to continue as a diabetes leader through the next 100 years as it has in the last 100 years.

In conclusion, back to the personal. This grandmother is sending the hundredth anniversary stamps — the first day cover celebrating the discovery of insulin — to her granddaughter in honour of our past Canadian contribution, in thanks for Canada's present-day research and in hope for the future cure. Colleagues, please support this bill. I doubt there are few of us who are not affected one way or another by this critical disease. Canada deserves a national framework and strategy. It can only improve the health of our citizens and the future well-being of many.

Thank you.
