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## **Rep. Ruth Jones McClendon Treated Successfully for Cancer**

### **Renews Commitment to Research, Prevention, and Early Detection**

SAN ANTONIO – October 26, 2009 – State Representative Ruth Jones McClendon (D-San Antonio) announced today that she recently completed successful treatment for non-small cell lung cancer, and has renewed her commitment to cancer research, prevention, and early detection.

“For years now, I have strongly supported cancer-related legislation in Texas. Now I am a cancer survivor and know what it’s like from the inside,” said Rep. McClendon. “My doctors tell me that I am a miracle. I say I am a survivor who is richly blessed by God! Now I want to tell my success story and be an advocate for others diagnosed with cancer. This experience makes me more committed than ever to take action and help others through my efforts as a Legislator. ”

Non-small cell lung cancer is the most common cancer among smokers, and represents 85% of the lung cancers diagnosed. Rep. McClendon is a former smoker and quit smoking in 1998. Research has shown that quitting smoking greatly reduces the health effects of smoking and that the lungs can repair some of the damage. People, who quit, regardless of age, live longer than people who continue to smoke.

“We applaud Representative McClendon for wanting to share her story and stand up for others who have experienced cancer,” said Sharon Wilks, MD, San Antonio medical oncologist and spokesperson for the American Cancer Society. “All cancer, including lung cancer, takes a higher toll in the African American community.”

African American males are about 37 percent more likely to die of cancer than white males; African American females are about 17 percent more likely to die of cancer compared to white females.

“I want to tell my story and do something about this terrible disease. Texas is in a unique position to make a difference. The Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, which I proudly supported, have put together a world class team that will provide funding for significant progress against cancer,” said Rep. McClendon. “For the next Texas **Legislative** Session, I’ll be working with organizations on legislation that would have a significant impact on cancer. I also plan to file a Bill that will focus on prevention and early detection; the text of the Bill will be released when it is filed in November, 2010.”

Rep. McClendon was diagnosed in June and has finished radiation and chemotherapy treatments. Included in her chemotherapy treatment was Avastin, a drug approved in 2004 that provided the first validation that the approach of “starving the tumor,” used by American Cancer Society funded researcher, Dr. Judah Folkman, would succeed. Avastin, a monoclonal antibody, was the first product to be approved that works by preventing the formation of new blood vessels, a process known as angiogenesis.

“Avastin, which was included in my chemotherapy treatment, was made possible through American Cancer Society funded research. I am thankful to the American Cancer Society for all the good work they do. I’m thankful to God, and to my medical team, Dr. Amy Lang, Dr. Keith Ayre, Dr. Martin Weisenthal and Dr. Arturo Homma, for my survival. I also very grateful for the support of my family and friends who helped me fight this disease,” said Rep. McClendon.

Rep. Ruth Jones McClendon is a former San Antonio city council member and has served in the Texas House of Representatives since 1996, representing District 120. She has authored, sponsored, co-sponsored, and passed more than 160 bills during her tenure in the Texas House. She was honored in 2007 with the Texas Advocacy Award from the American Cancer Society for her outstanding legislative advocacy for the

quality of life of cancer patients. She considers her greatest accomplishments are being a mother, having a rewarding family life in the midst of the rigors of public service, serving her community as a state representative, and being a cancer survivor.

The American Cancer Society offers support and hope for people diagnosed with lung cancer and their families as well as resources to help smokers quit 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including the Quitline, which has provided services to more than 100,000 callers since its launch in May 2000. For more information, call 800-ACS-2345 or visit [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org). The American Cancer Society is comprised of staff and volunteers who are dedicated to saving lives and creating more birthdays by helping people stay well and get well, by finding cures, and by fighting back against cancer.

## **Representative Ruth Jones McClendon's Remarks**

*Thank you for that kind introduction, Dr. Wilks. Dr. Sharon Wilks is nationally renowned for her work in community service, cancer advocacy and patient care. Her spirit of giving back comes from personal experience. As a child in Baltimore, she was considered a "bookworm". Her father died of lung cancer, and she grew strength from her mother who opened her life to education and the love of reading. I thank you for being here this morning.*

My husband, Denver, is here and I would not be standing before you this morning without his loving attention and support. I am so blessed that God gave you to me. I want to thank my other family members and friends for respecting my wishes. I asked them not to attend this morning. This can be quite emotional, and I wanted to try to get through it with relatively dry eyes. In their absence, I feel surrounded by their love and prayers.

To say that I never dreamed that I would be telling you today that I have been treated for lung cancer is an understatement. It's still hard to believe. The good news is I have been greatly blessed that my treatment has been successful. My doctors say they detect no evidence of cancer.

I am now one of eleven million American cancer survivors. My doctors tell me that I am a miracle. I say I am a survivor who is richly blessed by God! Getting here has been a rocky road, but there were some important messages along the way I want to share.

The first message I'd like to deliver is -- listen to your body. Toward the end of the Legislative Session, I knew I needed medical attention for a cough and tingling in my fingers, but it didn't occur to me that it would mean a diagnosis of cancer. However, I am extremely glad to have been diagnosed promptly and properly, so that I could proceed to treatment. Dr. Amy Lang, my oncologist prescribed a very aggressive treatment plan, and I am thrilled and grateful to say, successful in my case.

I guessed something was not right when the fingers on my right hand began to tingle. Of course, being busy as we were, you try to ignore something that minor. However, at the end of the Legislative Session I made an appointment with my doctor, Dr. Martin Wiesenthal, that same week. He immediately sent me for a hand MRI, a brain MRI and a chest x-ray. The following work day I was told they suspected lung cancer, which was later confirmed to be Stage IV. I felt like someone had dropped a bowling ball in the middle of my stomach. But, with a diagnosis that severe, I could only

feel sorry for myself for a very short time...I had to start fighting, and that's just what I did.

My tumor was not detected because of luck or by accident. It was found because of the knowledge and awareness that lead me to listen to my body and know something was not right. I underwent fifteen sessions of radiation and four sessions of chemotherapy during a three month period with minimal side effects. I was blessed to be able to carry on a relatively normal schedule, making public appearances when necessary and meeting with my constituents and community leaders. Since my husband and I both have very hectic schedules, it certainly was a challenge to schedule my medical appointments around our schedules, but somehow, we made it happen.

Dr. Lang and I have decided that I will be on maintenance therapy for an indeterminate period of time, which begins in December, 2009. Maintenance therapy is given to help keep cancer from coming back after it has disappeared following the initial therapy. I understand that the concept of "maintenance" has not traditionally been part of the vocabulary for cancer patients in previous years.

When I received the prestigious award from ASC for legislative advocacy for cancer patients in 2007, little did I know that just two years later I would have to advocate for myself. But, I'll tell you, if I hadn't been an advocate for myself, if I hadn't listened to my body, I wouldn't be here today.

I urge those who think they might need to see a doctor, either for a regular checkup or for particular symptoms, I say, "Do not let fear hold you back -- that fear might be the very thing that would prevent your recovery!" I stand here as living proof that a diagnosis of cancer is no longer a death sentence, as we used to think of it. It is not a walk in the park, but with proper diagnosis and treatment, there is hope and joy. I

was also very fortunate enough to have excellent health insurance, to which so many of my fellow Texans do not have access. Hopefully, that will change soon.

The second message is the importance of cancer-related legislation. Funding for the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas is critical to the survival of the 98,000 Texans who will be diagnosed with cancer this year. I fought for that funding and will work diligently in the appropriations process in 2011 to make resources available for those purposes. Also, I'll be working closely with organizations on legislation that would have a significant impact on cancer. I will also file a Bill that will focus on prevention and early detection; the text of the Bill will be released when it is filed in November, 2010.

The third message is, do not underestimate the power of prayer! God's grace is amazing and awesome, and I have definitely been carried on the wings of prayer, by my family members and friends over the past months.

Finally, I would like to thank the American Cancer Society for all the work that they do, especially for their research that made the lifesaving drug that I am taking now a possibility.

I'm so very thankful to God, and to my medical team, Dr. Amy Lang, Dr. Keith Ayre, Dr. Martin Weisenthal and Dr. Arturo Homma, for my survival. I wish my fabulous team of physicians had been able to be here and share this announcement with me, but could not because of commitments to their other patients. Also, I am so very grateful for the support of my family and friends who helped me fight this disease.

I am very much looking forward to continued service in the Texas House of Representatives, and will be prepared to continue the fight against cancer at the Capitol, through good legislation and a lot of hard work.