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## Wasserman Schultz's new issue: cancer awareness

By LESLEY CLARK

Two days after disclosing her fight with cancer, Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz launched into advocacy Monday, championing legislation that calls for greater awareness of breast cancer among younger women.

At a Capitol news conference, the Broward Democrat introduced a bill that would direct the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop a national campaign to boost awareness among women under the age of 40 and encourage early detection.

"It is my hope that by sharing my story, we will pass the [bill] and further reduce the death rate of young women diagnosed with breast cancer," said Wasserman Schultz, 42. "We have to ensure that every young woman can rely on more than just luck."

By her side: cancer treatment and research advocates including activist Maimah Karmo, diagnosed with breast cancer at 32. Like Wasserman Schultz, Karmo discovered a lump during a self-exam.

Wasserman Schultz -- who last year juggled seven surgeries while continuing her work as a congresswoman and high-ranking Democrat -- at times struggled to keep her composure Monday, tearing up as she thanked her husband and family for their support.

During her illness, she told just two members of Congress: Rep. Ron Klein, D-Boca Raton, with whom she served in the Florida Legislature, and Rep. Melissa Bean of Illinois.

Bean, who shares a Capitol Hill townhome with Wasserman Schultz, called the Broward Democrat an inspiration to others. The pair, for a time, backed different Democratic presidential contenders and continued their lively debates through Wasserman Schultz's illness.

### **`NEVER SAW HER PAUSE'**

"We'd still argue over all the primary stuff," Bean said. "You just never saw her pause."

Sen. Hillary Clinton -- Wasserman Schultz's original pick for the presidency -- called the congresswoman Monday.

"We had the most awesome conversation," Wasserman Schultz said. "She said, 'Thanks for everything you've done for me,' but I thanked her. I was so happy to be out there during the year, for her presidential campaign and President Obama's campaign. Having so many balls in the air helped me not to dwell on myself."

Appearing on *Good Morning America* to talk about her bill Monday, the congresswoman insisted the effort to pass her bill shouldn't revolve around her story.

### **`NOT ABOUT ME'**

"This is not about me," she said as a Broward woman at the news conference told her she was "awed" by her. "I'm not Superwoman."

Wasserman Schultz said she decided to keep her diagnosis private out of a desire to retain some control and keep her three young children from worrying. She scheduled her surgeries around Congressional breaks so as not to miss votes. A Washington Post database showed Wasserman Schultz missed 3.1 percent of votes in the last Congress, when she was fighting cancer; the previous Congress, she missed 3.6 percent of votes.

Wasserman Schultz, who was easily reelected to her third term last fall, said she decided not to tell her constituents about her diagnosis because she believed her work was not affected by her illness.

"My constituents deserve to know personal things that might affect them, but this wasn't one of them," she said, noting that she still made dozens of official appearances in the district and campaigned for Clinton, Obama and other Democrats across the country.

### **CO-SPONSORS**

Her legislation is co-sponsored in the House by Rep. Sue Myrick, a North Carolina Republican and breast cancer survivor. Its Senate sponsor is Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., who worked with Wasserman Schultz on her signature pool safety bill.

Dubbed the Early Act, the bill calls on the CDC to develop a national educational campaign to help young women and providers identify their risks and know the warning signs of breast cancer. Although breast cancer's incidence is lower for young women than for older women, the disease is generally more aggressive within the younger group.

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