

STATEMENT OF SENATOR GORDON H. SMITH

U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging
“Boomers and the Budget: What Does it Mean for America’s Seniors”
February 12, 2007

Good morning and thank you all for being here today.

With each new year comes a new budget and a new responsibility for Congress to ensure that our government, and the important programs it supports, are sufficiently funded. Last week, as President Bush released his outline for the Fiscal Year 2008 budget, I felt it appropriate to convene members of this Committee to hear directly from top agency officials on how programs and services for seniors will be impacted by the President’s budget plan.

Today we are fortunate to be joined by Commissioner Michael Astrue of the Social Security Administration; Acting Administrator Leslie Norwalk of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; Assistant Secretary for Aging, Josefina G. Carbonell, at the Administration on Aging; and Assistant Secretary Brian Montgomery at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. All of our witnesses’ respective agencies are vitally important to this discussion, and I look forward to their comments.

I would like to extend a special thank you to Commissioner Astrue, whose first day on the job was this past Monday. I appreciate his willingness to make his debut before Congress as the new SSA Commissioner, here in the Aging Committee.

In my opinion, the Social Security Administration is one of the government’s most important agencies to the well-being of society’s most vulnerable. I look forward to speaking with Commissioner Astrue about SSA’s funding needs to ensure that the agency continues to provide quality service.

Along with SSA, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services is tasked with running some of the most vital programs for our health care safety-net. I am deeply concerned about the impact of many of the proposals put forth in the FY08 budget related to Medicare and Medicaid. Given that about 92 million Americans receive benefits from these important programs, we should think twice before cutting care to those in need solely on the basis of reducing costs.

I am pleased with the President’s request to provide funding for the newly created Choices program at the Administration on Aging. America’s baby boomer population is facing the often tough process of planning for their long-term care needs, and the Choices program will help them make more informed decisions. This is definitely a step in the right direction, but we need to recognize that the budget for the agency as a whole has been cut by \$28 million from 2007. As AoA is a main source of funds for the coordination of local services for the elderly across America, I look forward to hearing from Assistant Secretary Carbonell on this and other critical resources at AoA.

Lastly, we are fortunate to have with us today Assistant Secretary Montgomery from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. HUD provides critical housing programs and services for our elderly population, such as a reverse mortgage program and assistance programs for those who need affordable housing. My hope is that Assistant Secretary Montgomery will shed some light on the funding needs of these important programs.

The Senate Special Committee on Aging has a long and distinguished history of leading the Senate on issues of great importance to our aging population. We have an opportunity today to focus the on-going FY08 budget debate related to seniors, and ensure that their needs will be met.