

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GORDON H. SMITH

Special Committee on Aging Hearing “Nursing Home Transparency and Improvement” November 15, 2007

I want to thank Senator Kohl for holding this important hearing today to continue the discussion on nursing home quality. These discussions are necessary to ensure that those in need of long-term care get the quality care they deserve. The issue of nursing home quality and safety is of particular interest to me and I thank the panelists for being here today.

I especially want to thank Senator Grassley. As a former chair of this Committee and having served as both Chairman and Ranking Member of the Finance Committee, the interest of our citizens in nursing homes has long been a priority for him.

We know that the need for long-term care is expected to grow significantly in coming decades. Almost two-thirds of people currently receiving long-term care are over age 65, and this number is expected to double by 2030. We also know that the population over age 85, those most likely to need long-term services and supports, is expected to increase by more than 250 percent by 2040 from 4.3 million to 15.4 million.

Today, millions of Americans are receiving or are in need of long-term care services and supports. Surprisingly, more than 40 percent of persons receiving long-term care are between the ages of 18 and 64.

The past two decades have revealed a shift in the provision of long-term care. A great example of this is in my home state of Oregon, where much of the care is provided in community settings and in the recipient’s home. We also have seen that long-term care providers are offering services that put the patient at the center of care, encourage inclusion of families in decision-making and give more choices in the location of the care, such as community-based and in-home settings.

As I have said in this Committee before, ensuring patient safety is a responsibility that rests with no one party or entity. It is shared by care providers, the federal and state governments, law enforcement agents, local agencies and community advocates. It is a responsibility that I take very seriously, as I know my colleagues do.

We must all work together more collaboratively to curb the incidence of elder abuse. We owe that to the millions of seniors who have placed their trust in our nation’s long-term care system and to those who remain in their homes and in their communities. The passage of the Elder Justice Act would be a wonderful and much needed step towards this goal.

Apart from improving communication and cooperation of enforcement activities, there may need to be new, stronger policies in place to ensure that seniors receive the safest long-term care

possible. I have reintroduced the “Long-Term Care Quality and Modernization Act” with Senator Lincoln. This bill encourages a number of important improvements to nursing homes and the long-term care system that aim to enhance the quality and safety of care provided to our seniors. I look forward to continuing to work with many of the advocates, industry representatives and regulators here today to ultimately pass this legislation.

I would like to applaud the work that Senator Kohl has done in this area as well, especially in regard to helping nursing homes and other facilities better identify potential bad actors in the workforce and to ensure families are informed of facility quality. It is essential that we find more effective ways to help poor performing facilities operate at a much higher level of care, or consider ways that they can be phased out of the system. We cannot let the inappropriate actions of a few continue to destroy the trust our nation’s seniors have placed in the long-term care system.

I am confident that the fine panels of experts Senator Kohl has assembled today will be able to provide a fresh insight on the work that is being done at the federal, state and local levels to reduce elder abuse and provide the safest, highest quality care possible.

Thank you.