

**OPENING STATEMENT BY
LARRY E. CRAIG, CHAIRMAN**

Good Morning. Thank you for attending our Senate Special Committee on Aging hearing on the National Family Caregiver Support Program.

Last year, Congress passed legislation reauthorizing the Older Americans' Act. I was an original cosponsor of that legislation, which updated and amended the Older Americans' Act, and I was extremely gratified when it became law.

As part of this reauthorization, Congress added an important and exciting new component to the Act. Specifically, this legislation authorized \$125 million to establish a new National Family Caregiver Support Program to assist those many daughters, sons, husbands, and wives who are struggling with the daily task of caring for older family members.

During our consideration of the reauthorization, we in Congress heard overwhelmingly from family caregivers all over America. These caregivers let us know, loud and clear, what their most urgent needs are:

- First, respite care -- to give family members caring for an elderly loved one a little bit of time away, whether to attend to other family or professional matters, or maybe simply to take a well-deserved break.
- Second, basic and practical education about the nuts and bolts of being a caregiver. How do you bathe someone who can't walk? Where do you go to get special beds and other needed equipment? Most family caregivers are not formally trained, and many are desperate for someplace to turn for answers to basic questions like these.
- Third, support and counseling. Caring for an ailing family member can be among life's most demanding challenges. It is a hard and often lonely burden. For many in this situation, something as simple as a local support group, or a counselor to talk to, can be a precious lifeline that makes the burden bearable.

At the moment, the states have just recently received their initial funding for the new Caregiver program, and most are now in the process of making critical decisions about how the funds will be used.

Our first goal today will be to look at this new program before it gets fully implemented in the states, and to assess how the states are setting up their programs. I believe it is imperative we ensure that the new funding be focused as directly as possible on those things the caregivers themselves tell us they need most -- namely, respite, education, and support. Similarly, we must keep a watchful eye to make sure that as many of the new dollars as possible get to the actual caregivers on the front lines, rather than simply being used for more agency staff or administration. Secondly, we also hope today to examine whether or not the states are receiving the clear and effective guidance they need from the federal Administration on Aging regarding the program's implementation.

Again, I would like to thank the witnesses for attending and I look forward to hearing your testimony. Thank You.