

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GORDON H. SMITH

Special Committee on Aging Hearing
“Abuse of Our Elders: How Can We Stop It?”
July 18, 2007

I want to thank Senator Kohl for holding this important hearing today. The issue of nursing home quality and safety has long been an issue of particular interest for me and I thank the panelists for being here today. The essential work that they do—whether monitoring care or advocating for nursing home residents—supplies the framework that helps so many of our elderly family members age with dignity.

The past two decades have revealed a true culture shift occurring within the world of long-term care, including services that put the patient at the center of care, encourage inclusion of families in decision-making and giving more choices in the location of the care, such as community-based and in-home settings. However, with those advances has come the need to pay greater attention to the quality of care that is provided to seniors in all types of long-term care settings.

Ensuring patient safety is a responsibility that rests with no one party or entity. It is shared by 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. I believe there is a need for all stakeholders to work 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.

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 plan to reintroduce the “Long-Term Care Quality and Modernization Act” with Senator Lincoln. This bill will encourage 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 working with many of the advocates, industry representatives and regulators here today to ultimately pass this legislation.

I would like to applaud the work 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. It is essential that we find more effective ways to help poorly 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.