

STATEMENT FOR SENATOR CHARLES E. GRASSLEY

Senate Special Committee on Aging

Hearing on Prostate Cancer

September 23, 1997

It is an honor for me today to have the Senate Special Committee on Aging hold this important hearing on prostate cancer. At the request of Senator Shelby, a prostate cancer survivor, I agreed to bring this issue before the committee to raise public awareness about this deadly disease. I am pleased to hold this hearing and to have my colleague, Senator Shelby, chair this special event.

I am also honored to have my former colleague and Senate Majority Leader, Bob Dole, here with us today. Senator Dole is a survivor of prostate cancer and has had an enormous impact on encouraging men to seek screening. I also want to welcome all the other witnesses here today and to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to appear before the committee.

As many of you know, this is Prostate Cancer Awareness Week. We hope today's hearing will contribute to greater public awareness about the dangers of this disease. Prostate cancer is the most common form of cancer in American men. It's the second leading cause of cancer death among men. This year alone over 330,000 new cases of prostate cancer will be diagnosed. This disease is especially common among African-American males. In fact, African-American men have the highest prostate cancer mortality rate in the world.

This issue is not just about men. It's about families. It's no secret that most men are big chickens when it comes to going to the doctor. In fact, my wife could testify about how stubborn I can be at times. But in the end, she usually gets her way. Some of our witnesses here today can talk about the crucial role their spouses played in making them get screened which ultimately saved their lives.

Today's hearing will highlight the prevalence of this disease, the treatment and screening options, and the public debate surrounding screening and treatment. The recently passed Balanced Budget Act of 1997 includes a new preventative benefit - annual blood tests known as the PSA (prostate-specific antigen) test for Medicare beneficiaries age 50 and above. This will become available in the year 2000. While Medicare is going to cover this screening, there is still controversy in the medical community as to the merits of screening, particularly for men over the age of 70. We hope to gain more insight about this debate from the experts here today.

Again, I am pleased to be here today. Now, I would like to turn this hearing over to Senator Shelby, who will be chairing the proceedings this morning. Thank you for coming.