

STATEMENT OF SENATOR GORDON H. SMITH

U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging
“The Future of Alzheimer's: Breakthroughs and Challenges”
May 14, 2007

Good morning and thank you all for being here today.

I particularly want to thank Charles “Chuck” Jackson for flying across the country from Albany, Oregon, to share his personal story of living with Alzheimer’s disease. Whether it was through watching his family members suffer or in his personal battle, Alzheimer’s disease has had a presence throughout most of his life.

In fact, Chuck, who was diagnosed at age 50 with early onset, lost 17 members of his family to Alzheimer’s disease. I understand that Chuck’s Aunt Esther testified at one of the very first Alzheimer’s disease hearings in Congress about the need for increased research funding. Though we are pleased to have Chuck here with us today, it is unfortunate that 20 years later we must still hold hearing as Alzheimer’s disease continues to proliferate and funding remains insufficient.

The instances of Alzheimer’s disease in the United States are staggering. Every 71 seconds, someone in America develops Alzheimer’s disease. An estimated 5.2 million Americans of all ages and one in eight persons age 65 and older have the disease. Additionally, ten million baby boomers can expect to develop Alzheimer’s disease in their remaining lifetime.

In my state of Oregon, a total of 76,000 Oregonians have Alzheimer's disease or a related disorder. This represents a nearly 33 percent increase in the number of people age 65 and over with Alzheimer’s disease over the last eight years.

Sadly, to date, there is no treatment to delay or stop the deterioration of brain cells in Alzheimer’s disease.

To stem the tide, we must increase medical research funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Just two months ago, I sponsored an amendment to the budget to increase NIH’s funding by over two billion dollars. This is a good start, but now we need to make sure the funding actually gets appropriated.

Across the nation, many advances in research are being realized in NIH-funded facilities. For example, in Oregon, the Layton Center for Aging and Alzheimer’s Disease focuses on research aimed at detecting and preventing cognitive decline even before developing symptoms. The Center integrates its activities with the Oregon Alzheimer Disease Core Research Center, one of 30 national centers funded by NIH.

In addition to supporting on-going research, I am hopeful that Congress or the new Administration will lift the ban on federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. This will allow our greatest

minds in medicine to fully explore, in an ethical manner, the potential of these cells in treating Alzheimer's disease as well as some of life's other devastating diseases.

I also will continue to lead the effort here in the Senate to increase funding to the National Family Caregiver Support Program. This program is a component of the Older Americans Act, which funds an array of local programs to ensure that our seniors can remain in their homes as they age. The Caregiver Program in the Older Americans Act is vital to ensuring that families can receive information and assistance about available services, individual counseling, respite care, and access to adult day care or home care services. Funding for this program also works to organize support groups and establish caregiver training programs.

Unfortunately, all Older Americans Act programs are woefully underfunded and the need for caregiver supports far outweighs the support that local agencies are able to provide. I will continue to work with my partner in this effort, Senator Lincoln, to ensure that funding for these programs better reflects the needs in our country and I ask that everyone here today join me.

Fortunately, with the good work of the panel before us, as well as many others, families around the country are receiving help coping with the disease as well as finding treatment.

I look forward to hearing from each of you about how Congress can help support those individuals who are affected by Alzheimer's disease.

With that, I turn back to Chairman Kohl.