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## News Release

# Gordon H. Smith

U.S. Senator for Oregon

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### SMITH BILL COMBATS SOCIAL WORKER SHORTAGES

To prevent projected shortages in the field of social work, Senators Gordon H. Smith (R-OR) and Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) joined together in an effort to encourage recruitment and retention of social workers in the U.S. The senators' bill, the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act, was introduced today in recognition of World Social Work Day.

"Social workers are purveyors of compassion and advocates for the safety and welfare of our vulnerable citizens," said Senator Smith. "Unfortunately, in Oregon, the ratio of need far outstrips that of available care - a disparity that will only increase as our population ages. An investment in this important field will ensure that those in need are able to access the unique support and care of a social worker."

"Social workers provide a range of services in a variety of settings to Oregon's individuals, families and communities in need," said Stacey Skala Orr, Executive Director, National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Oregon Chapter. "In a time when the demand for quality behavioral health and social services is increasing, so is the demand for social workers who are trained, experienced professionals to provide these services. At the same time, the social work profession is facing a range of daunting challenges such as increasing student loan debt, insufficient salaries to comparable professions, professionals who are leaving and retiring out of the field in greater numbers, and ultimately a pending workforce shortage, particularly in the area of aging and child welfare. Senator Smith's leadership and support of the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act will help to enable social workers to better serve Oregon's communities while paving the way to secure a future and stable workforce."

Social workers provide critical services such as assisting veterans returning from combat zones with mental health crises, helping seniors maintain their independence in communities and placing abused children in safe homes. The current shortage of social workers is expected to worsen as the U.S. population ages and changes. Approximately 30,000 licensed social workers practice gerontology today; however, 60,000 to 70,000 will be needed by 2010. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that the total number of social workers per capita in Oregon is 135 per 100,000 population, ranking 34th among states.

In order to address the impending shortage crisis, the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act will fund demonstration grants for social work programs on workplace improvements, research, education and training, and community-based programs of excellence. The bill also will create a Commission to study services provided by social workers, issues of social worker recruitment, retention, and compensation, workplace safety, and state level social work licensing reciprocity. A National Coordination Center will be established to work with education, advocacy and research institutions to gather and distribute information and data on social work research.

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