Invest more in Head Start, Senator Smith says

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To ensure Americaâ€™s at-risk preschoolers continue developing fundamental skills that lead to success in the classroom, U.S. Senator Gordon H. Smith (R-Oregon) is urging Senate budget writers to increase funding in Fiscal Year 2008 for the Head Start program. Head Start grants help provide comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and families in all fifty states.

â€œInvesting in Head Start and quality child care now will improve education outcomes for our nationâ€™s at-risk kids and will save lives and money down the road,â€• Smith wrote. â€œReal dollar funding levels for Head Start and child care have been cut for the last several years, falling far behind the rising costs that programs face. Instead of reaching more eligible children with comprehensive health, nutrition and early education services, Head Start programs have been forced to create waiting lists, shorten program hours, cut back staff, reduce parent coaching and reduce transportation and other services that help families participate.â€•

Studies show that at-risk kids who attend Head Start and similar quality childcare are better prepared for school. Currently, only about half of eligible low-income children can attend Head Start because of state and deferral funding limitations. In Oregon, only 8,792 children were enrolled in 2006.

Senator Smith is recommending the inclusion of $750 million in additional funding for Head Start and $720 million in additional funding for Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), a step toward meeting the need for quality early education programs for at-risk children.