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## **Harkin, Cornyn Work to Promote Healthier Workplaces**

WASHINGTON – Today, Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA) and John Cornyn (R-TX) introduced the Workforce Health Improvement Program (WHIP) Act, a bill that would help small businesses provide wellness benefits to their workers by correcting an inequity in the tax code. The WHIP Act not only reaffirms the right of employers to deduct the cost of providing off-site athletic or fitness center benefits to their workers, but it would also allow employees to exclude up to \$900 of the off-site wellness benefit they receive from being considered taxable income.

“Incorporating health and wellness programs into the everyday routines of Americans is one of the best, most cost-effective ways to prevent chronic, obesity-related health problems like diabetes and heart disease. By making it easier for small businesses to offer wellness benefits, we can increase worker productivity, reduce health care costs, and promote healthier lifestyles,” said Harkin, who is Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee.

“The WHIP Act is an important step in reversing the largely preventable health crisis that our country is facing through the promotion of physical activity and disease prevention,” said Sen. Cornyn.

Current law permits businesses to deduct the cost of on-site workout facilities, which are provided for the benefit of employees on a pre-tax basis. However, many small employers do not have the resources or office space to offer on-site exercise rooms and fitness programs. The WHIP Act would provide a tax deduction to small businesses that offer exercise incentives, such as gym memberships, to their workers.

Physical inactivity is a key contributing factor to obesity and adversely affects workforce productivity. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the economic cost alone to businesses in the form of health insurance and absenteeism is more than \$15 billion. Additionally, the CDC estimates that only thirty percent of all U.S. adults meet minimum recommendations for aerobic physical activity based on national guidelines.

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