

Special Committee on Aging
Long-Term Care Financing: Blueprints for Reform

OPENING STATEMENT

of

CHAIRMAN BREAUX

This Committee has the responsibility to look ahead and see that as a nation we are prepared to handle the long-term care needs of the pending "age wave" of 77 million baby boomers. Unfortunately, our country lacks a comprehensive long-term care system. That is why this Committee devoted 13 hearings in the 107th Congress to long-term care - examining what is currently available in our country, how we finance long-term care and what we still need to do to guarantee a wide range of quality, affordable services to all disabled and elderly persons.

To capture the highlights of the expert witnesses who testified before the Committee we have produced a "findings report." I think of it as a kind of road map. We need to know where we have been in order to see where we need to go. Senator Craig and I hope that aging, health care and disability advocates will find this document useful in moving the long-term care debate forward.

Today we will be hearing from expert witnesses who will talk about what reform options to pay for a comprehensive long-term care system. Much good work has already been done and we want to take advantage of that wisdom. Other witnesses have come up with new approaches that are worthy of our time and attention. Equally important is the chance to learn what other developed countries are doing to finance long-term care services.

While we have talked about this issue in terms of the billions of dollars that are spent each year on services, the "institutional bias" that exists, and the "unmet need" for services, what we need to remember is that the issue of long-term care is very personal. It will affect each of us and our families at some point in time- if it hasn't already.

Today I would like to read you one of many letters that have been sent to me to demonstrate the real need out there for long-term care services.

Francis M. Stevenson

My name is Francis M. Stevenson. I am 73 years-old and I live in Napoleonville, Louisiana with my husband Dave, Sr. Dave is 76 years-old, an insulin dependent diabetic who has had several mini strokes, high blood pressure, dementia and has had a feeding

tube since May 1999 when his blood sugar elevated above 400. He wears diapers and must be bathed and changed at least twice daily. I must monitor his blood sugar at least three time daily, bathe him in the evenings, change his feeding bag daily, give medicine, insulin and tend to his oxygen tank.

Last May he had surgery to remove his gall bladder and at that time he spent several days in ICU and a few more days in step-down. Home health care is allowed to come in to help for a few weeks at a time after each stay in the hospital and then I am on my own.

My family helps me as often as they can, but they each have jobs. My son is an Army Officer stationed in Washington, DC. He gets to come home only about once a year. I have tried to get the VA to give us some aid since Dave is a World War II veteran. He served in the Marines for five years.

I have been paying an aide to come in and bathe him every morning for the last four years. Dave and I worked very hard throughout our lives and we felt that we would be all right in our later years. I can barely make ends meet with the cost of medicine, insurance, diapers, pads, bandages, the nurses aide, etc.

The Council on Aging put Dave on a program in February that will end in a few weeks. He had 24-four hour sessions of respite care, 34 hours of personal care and 18 hours of sitter care. I want him to be cared for at home, because I know this is where the best, tender, loving care will be given. I need Home health care and someone to help with home living. Please give us some help.

I think you will agree with me that this story makes this issue very real and very compelling. We owe it to these folks - and the millions of other like them - to replace an inefficient, outdated, and insufficient long-term care system with a better system that meets the needs of all Americans who need long-term care.