

Statement of Sen. Herb Kohl
“Aging in America: Future Challenges, Promise and Potential”
Senate Special Committee on Aging Forum
December 14, 2011

Good afternoon and thank you all for joining us here today.

Over the last 50 years, the Senate Special Committee on Aging has been in the thick of the debate on issues of central concern to older Americans. And, with more than 10,000 baby boomers turning 65 every day, the issues affecting older Americans are only becoming more urgent.

Throughout its history, the Aging Committee has continuously called attention and offered concrete solutions to a wide variety of problems affecting older Americans. From the cost of health care to retirement security to long-term care coverage options to employment opportunities for older Americans, this Committee has debated some of our country’s most difficult issues over the last half century.

We are also proud of the Aging Committee’s long-standing tradition of bipartisanship. This kind of cooperation and the hard work of talented leaders, including Senator Grassley, who will be joining us later, has helped to further our country’s commitment to caring for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

But we cannot rest on our laurels, much more needs to be done. And to get there, we need the help of experts like all of you here today.

We need to put Social Security back on a long-term path of solvency and strengthen our nation’s pension systems so that Americans can plan for a secure retirement after a lifetime of work. We must rein in rising health care costs and grapple with how to finance long-term care so that seniors can live independently for as long as possible.

More than most, older adults are feeling the effects of the struggling economy and local service cuts. Now is not the time to let home- and community-based programs, such as those funded by the Older Americans Act, languish.

As our nation ages, policies that improve the lives of older Americans will become even more critical to helping the entire economy. By 2030 – when the last of the baby boom generation reaches retirement age – nearly 20 percent of Americans will be over age 65, compared with 13 percent today. I'm hopeful that we will find the courage to craft an innovative and effective path forward – for the greater good of our nation's seniors and our country as a whole.

I have been the chairman of this Committee for nearly five years, and I am proud of everything we've accomplished and advanced. But today, we're here to learn from you, the experts, and I look forward to hearing this discussion.

I must also take a moment to recognize and thank the former staff of this Committee, some of whom are with us today. Please know that your hard work has made a difference in the lives of older Americans.

And with that, I will turn things over to the Aging Committee's Staff Director Deb Whitman, who will be moderating this forum. As all of you who know Deb are aware, I'll be putting you in very capable hands. Thank you, and I thank all of our distinguished panelists for being here today.