

**Opening Statement
of
Senator Charles E. Grassley, Chairman
Senate Special Committee on Aging
Older Americans and the Worldwide Web: the New Wave of Internet Users**

July 16, 1998

Good morning. I am glad to welcome all of you to today's forum. I appreciate your being here to discuss a tool that has unlimited potential for improving the lives of older Americans. I am especially grateful to our distinguished panel of speakers and to our moderator, Mary Furlong, who has been instrumental in coordinating this event.

We are here to discuss the role that the Internet currently plays and is likely to play in the future in the lives of older Americans. For a variety of reasons, many of us view the Internet and other forms of technology as tools of the young. And although young people are often the first to use new forms of technology, it often benefits older people just as much or more. I believe the Internet is such a case.

Older Americans are one of the fastest growing groups on the web. A Nielsen/CommerceNet report in March found that 7.6 million of the 50.6 million Internet users in North America are age 50 or older. The Internet presents enormous opportunities for older persons, and clearly they are beginning to take notice.

The Internet has a growing place in the lives of older Americans. It will benefit seniors by providing a medium for social interaction through E. mail and chat rooms. It will also be an important resource for helping seniors continue to learn, through formal on-line classes and informal learning through access to cultural, historical and informational sites. Medicare Compare, the Health Care Financing Administration's web site for Medicare beneficiaries, is a prime example of a site that will be an important resource for older Americans.

The Internet will also provide opportunities for seniors and others with limited mobility to purchase goods and services in the convenience of their own homes. A number of industries have tapped into this market, selling everything from books and groceries, to stocks and bonds. On-line industry is expected to expand quickly in the future.

As the Internet becomes integrated into daily life we must remember that although seniors may be among the most obvious beneficiaries of new technology, they are sometimes the most afraid of it. The Internet can help seniors enhance their skills and job performance, but it can also act as a barrier to employment because of fear of new technology. We need to work to ensure that older Americans are not left behind on the information superhighway. A number of community, religious and industry groups have risen to this challenge, including an adult day health center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that I visited last week called Milestones, which has dedicated a portion of their space and resources to a computer facility with classes and access to the Internet.

I would like to share an E. mail that a member of my staff received from his 83 year old grandmother. I think this letter is a perfect example of how the Internet can benefit older Americans.

My computer was ordered on the phone by your Uncle Gene after I said I would like one. I use it the PC for fun and to exercise my brain when I play games on it. I keep track of my investments several times a week. I use it to keep my checking accounts in good order. I enjoy the news on the Web and many other

things. I'm not much inclined to use the chat rooms. I listen from time to time but am self conscious about speaking up. I enjoy finding things about Washington D.C. since you are there and I have been there recently . I guess your could use the old saying it is a window to the world when I take time to use it. Then to I have ordered merchandise -the book -and will do so again. I just read today that some think it is the market place of the future and malls will soon be out of style. I don't think so and I hope not.

I would now like to show a brief video tape provided by SeniorNet, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating older adults about computer technology. What you are about to see are clips of older Americans describing their experiences on-line.

I am confident that this forum will highlight both the opportunities and challenges that the Internet presents for older Americans. I look forward to hearing more.

Now, I am pleased to introduce Mary Furlong, who will serve as moderator. Ms. Furlong is a leading authority on technology and aging.

She is currently Chairman and CEO of Third Age Media- a new Internet-based programming and services company geared toward older adults, as well as a professor of Education and Technology at the University of San Francisco.

Before founding Third Age Media in 1996, Mary founded SeniorNet, which I mentioned earlier. We're very pleased you were able to join us today.

Ms. Furlong will introduce the panelists and will lead today's discussion. After we hear from each of the panelists, she will take written questions from the audience. My staff has provided question cards which they will be collecting during the forum.