

**STATEMENT OF
SENATOR CHARLES E. GRASSLEY**

September 14, 1999

I am pleased to chair this inspiring hearing today, which will feature Margaret Richards, the well-known host of the PBS exercise program, Body Electric, and who is a national spokesperson on the importance of physical fitness as we age. We will also hear from several outstanding senior athletes participating in this year's National Senior Games, and two very distinguished researchers in the field of aging. We will learn through their testimony that incorporating exercise, even moderate exercise, into our daily routine can have profound and lasting effects on our health and quality of life. In fact, it can even extend our life by a decade or more.

The good news is it is never too late to start. In fact, I turned 65 last year and one of my goals for the new year was to take up running. When I began, I could not even run a mile without stopping. I would have to run, walk, run, walk. Some days there was a lot more walking than running. But through persistence and discipline, I kept going. Now, I can say I feel better; I sleep better; and I can run a couple of miles without having to stop. In fact, I entered my first 5K race this month. I am sure, however, that the athletes we will hear from this afternoon will be able to affirm that age is not what limits most of us. It is usually our fears and our excuses that limit us.

As the population ages at an unprecedented rate and scientific/medical advances enable people to live well into their 80's, 90's and beyond, the need is clear for a definite understanding of how to improve the quality of life for older Americans. Public policy and private enterprise should help promote programs and education that meet this need. Research has shown that there is a direct correlation between mental and physical fitness and quality of life. This nexus is even more pronounced as people age. Research shows that mental and physical fitness are increasingly attainable goals for people in their later years. In addition to improving quality of life, exercise among the elderly will have a profound economic impact, especially as the number of people over 65 swells to 76 million after the baby boomers retire.

Today's hearing will highlight seniors who are examples of healthy aging. Leading researchers will show the correlation between exercise and independence for older Americans. Research shows that even among nursing home residents, exercise can improve the quality of life. Senior athletes who will participate in this year's Senior Olympics will share their philosophies on aging and how healthy aging is possible for anyone. These Olympians are from various walks of life and have differing perspectives on why they are active.

The National Senior Games Association which sponsors the Senior Olympics has been a pioneer in providing education, promoting research and providing sports and fitness opportunities for more than ten years. During this short time, the Association has established hundreds of local games programs throughout the country, state senior games in 49 states, and a national competition this October in which 12,000 seniors will participate in Orlando, Florida.

The athletes we will hear from are an inspiration to all of us. My hope is that their stories will encourage others to begin a physical fitness program that is right for them.

I want to emphasize, however, that you do not have to be an athlete or an Olympian to reap the rewards of exercise. In fact, countless studies have demonstrated that moderate exercise, even after a lifetime of inactivity, can have profound effects on our health and quality of life. The National Institute on Aging, which is represented today by Dr. Wetle, publishes a wonderful exercise guide for people who want to

start a fitness program. The tips in this book are designed to help anyone who wants to begin exercising design a program that is right for them. You don't even have to join a gym to do it. You can exercise in your own home, if that works best for you. So, I hope seniors will take advantage of the resources that are available to them to make fitness a part of their daily routine.

There is much we can do to improve our health and prevent illness if we are committed to an exercise program and are disciplined about it. With people living longer, health care costs rising faster than ever, and programs such as Medicare in deep financial trouble, we need to take personal responsibility for our own health wherever possible. Today's hearing should leave us all with the challenge to stay physically fit as long as we are able to and to not let age be a convenient excuse to become a couch potato.

I look forward to hearing the testimony from our distinguished witnesses today and hope we will all be inspired to meet our personal best after hearing their stories.