

Opening Statement of Sen. Chuck Grassley
Hearing: "The Baby Boomers are Coming: Aging in a New Millennium"
Monday, Nov. 8, 1999

I'd like to call this hearing to order. Thank you to our witnesses and to the members of the audience for joining us today.

When Senator Breaux and I took over the leadership of the Special Committee on Aging, our first hearing was on preparing for the baby boomers' retirement. The subject matter was no coincidence. We wanted to demonstrate early on that our committee recognized what would happen when this group retired.

Since that first hearing in March 1997, we've learned a lot more about the aging of the baby boomers. For example, we have a much greater understanding now of what will happen to Social Security and Medicare than we did two years ago. We've carried that understanding into policy debates of how to save these retirement programs for the largest generation of retirees in our nation's history. These debates are ongoing. Others arise every day.

The task of anticipating the baby boomers' needs is huge. I'm grateful for Senator Breaux's leadership in broadening our committee's focus beyond the baby boomer impact on government programs.

Senator Breaux knows that it isn't enough for members of Congress to draft policy and legislation reflecting this group's retirement. We also must educate baby boomers about taking pro-active steps to prepare for their older years.

With education in mind, Senator Breaux has prepared a boomer scorecard. His card lists, as he puts it, 10 things every aging boomer needs to know. The question format provokes thought about critical retirement issues. These include prescription drug coverage, long-term care insurance and saving money for retirement.

All of us could benefit from a self-assessment like this. There's no such thing as too much planning for retirement or beginning to plan too early. I'm giving Senator Breaux's scorecard to each of my baby boomer children. I hope we'll discuss the results at the dinner table. I encourage other parents of baby boomers to do the same.

Today we have several witnesses who will jumpstart our thinking about the future.

We'll begin with one of the nation's best-known baby boomers, Tipper Gore. Mrs. Gore represents the public service spirit that her generation embraces. She serves the nation with her work on mental health, children's health, education and many other issues. My wife, Barbara, was able to see Mrs. Gore in action last week. They spoke about women's health care at a conference in Des Moines.

After Mrs. Gore, we'll hear from three visionaries with an ability to describe the impact of and capture the needs of an entire generation. Thank you.