

Opening Statement of Senator John Breaux

I am pleased to be here today with Senator Mikulski and the Health Education Labor and Pensions (HELP) Subcommittee on Aging. Hearings such as this to highlight long-term care and caregiving are more important now than ever as we anticipate the retirement of the baby boom generation.

I am pleased to have with us our women Senators, representing those that bear the greatest burden of long-term care and caregiving. I know many of the Senators testifying today will have their own personal experiences of grappling with these issues. I also want to welcome the Older Women's League and the National Alliance for Caregiving who have been working on these issues for many years and have innovative ideas for addressing them.

Women make up a disproportionate share of caregivers in this country, with very little public support. For example, women comprise more than 80 percent of the family caregivers for chronically ill elders. The average American woman can expect to spend 17 years caring for a child and 18 years caring for an elderly parent. I know that my own wife has this experience. In addition, women live longer than men, and therefore will need to personally access long-term care more frequently. And yet our public policies do very little to provide a network of support to caregivers.

We lack a cohesive long-term care system in this country and we will pay a dear price for this when the baby boomers retire. What we do have does little to support long-term care programs that promote independent living such as home and community based care. Addressing the need for a comprehensive long-term care system in this country requires most of all creating policies that recognize the role of caregivers. Otherwise, we will face a national crisis when the baby boom generation retires.

Knowing the primary role women play in caregiving and in our long-term care system, I am pleased to hear from our women Senators who will be integral to this debate as we seek to create better long-term care policies in this country.