

**Opening Statement of Senator Herb Kohl
Special Committee on Aging Hearing
Seniors Feeling the Squeeze:
Rising Drug Prices and the Part D Program
March 17, 2010**

Good afternoon, and thank you to all the witnesses for joining us. I'm pleased to have Senator Bill Nelson chair today's hearing on the effect of high drug prices on America's seniors and the Medicare Part D program. Senator Nelson is a valuable member of the Aging Committee, who hails from a state that understands very well the unique challenges and opportunities posed by an aging population. He has been a leader on this issue and we're very happy to have him leading the charge for the Aging Committee.

Before I turn over the gavel, I want to make sure we all understand that prices for brand name drugs are higher in this country than anywhere else in the world. This affects seniors severely, both because they tend to need more medications, and because of the doughnut hole in Medicare Part D, which can cost individuals up to \$4400 out of pocket every year.

But ultimately, the high price of drugs affects us all. Americans pay as much as two to three times as much for the same medications as people in other industrialized countries. This is one of the reasons health care costs are so much higher in America.

I've written letters to the top six drug makers to find out why. Why must American consumers pay so much more, when the bulk of drug research and innovation happens here in the U.S and much of it is subsidized by the federal government? The Aging Committee looks forward to taking a look at the answers to these questions later this spring.

In the meantime, today's hearing is getting at an ongoing issue that is crucial to our seniors. I would like to thank Senator Nelson for all his work on closing the doughnut hole. I'll now turn over the gavel.