

# U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY

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 **RANKING MEMBER** *Special Committee on Aging*

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## **Sen. Casey Opening Statement Hearing on Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults and Individuals with Disabilities April 27, 2017**

“Chairman Collins, Thank you very much for calling this hearing and for your opening statement.

“We of course want to begin a process today of examining both social isolation and loneliness.

“As the chairman mentioned, this will be a two-part hearing series.

“Today, we will focus on the consequences of social isolation and loneliness.

“In two weeks, we will examine macro solutions to isolation and loneliness, focusing on livable communities.

“Taken together, these hearings will provide the committee with the opportunity to examine the full scope of an issue facing seniors as well as others across the country.

“One of the most searing reminders of this is came from a New York Times op-ed back in December by Dr. Khullar from Harvard University and Mass General who said in his op-ed about this issue entitled ‘How Social Isolation Is Killing Us.’

“I thought one of the most searing reminders he talking about an individual that he knew would be dying. He said, ‘for me the sadness of his death surpassed only by the sadness of his solitude.’ I think that sums it up.

“We hope that this hearing, and the series of two hearings, will inform our engagement on other matters as well that may be coming before the Senate, like the President’s Budget request or potentially an infrastructure package.

“You might be asking how this work is connected to loneliness and social isolation are connected.

“Let me explain. In March, like a lot of parts of the country, my hometown of Scranton, Pa., in Lackawanna County, was his hard by a last gasp of winter by a terrible blizzard, Meals on Wheels in that moment became even more important.

“The blizzard did not stop Meals on Wheels in northeastern, Pennsylvania.

“One of the drivers that meet with a couple of days after he had been out in that snowstorm, went to a home in Pocono Mountains area of Lackawanna County to drop off a weekly supply of meals.

“Upon arrival, the driver heard the homeowner calling out for help.

“This individual had fallen into a snowbank while wearing shorts and just a t-shirt. He had fallen after going outside.

“That Meals on Wheels driver saved that man’s life that day, there is no doubt about it.

“When it comes to Meals on Wheels, I think the administrations proposed cuts are misguided, to say the least.

“I believe that Democrats and Republicans can agree on issues like that. We have a great deal to work together on to address our nation’s infrastructure in addition to that, so that we have improved accessibility. This would include improving signage that makes it easier to read, and also includes constructing curb cut-outs so those who are aging or have disabilities can continue to get around their communities.

“And finally, enhancing access to technology and broadband so those in rural communities can stay connected to their loved ones.

“I would say parenthetically another story that I read in Politico talking about loneliness and isolation just in Rural America, and I think its recommended reading for all of us.

“Improvements like the ones I just mentioned, will help individuals venture outside of their home and into their communities with success as well as stay connected to those who are most important in their lives.

“I look forward to this hearing and discussing these pressing issues with our witnesses today, that I thank, as well as the Chair, for being here today and for rearranging your schedules.

“Chairman Collins, I’m also told in the audience today we also have the Acting Director of the Administration on Community Living at the Department of Health and Human Services, Bob Williams, and we want to acknowledge his presence as well.

“Thank you, Madam Chair.”

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