



UNITED STATES SENATE
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
RANKING MEMBER TIM SCOTT

Ranking Member Tim Scott, Opening Statement

Hearing: "Mental Health Care for Older Adults: Raising Awareness, Addressing Stigma, and Providing Support"

Date: 05/19/22

Thank you, Chairman Casey, for holding another truly important hearing. To the guest panelists, thank you so much for participating in this process. Without question, your expertise will lend itself to us uncovering more solutions and providing more assistance to those who are certainly in need of that assistance.

I'd also like to take the time to recognize the students behind the witnesses, the University of South Carolina's pharmacy students, who are part of the Walker Scholars Program. ... I am always happy to see folks in a room from my home state, and thank you so much for taking your time and investing a part of it in this important topic.

And without any question, as the students are here with us, it really is important for us, Chairman Casey, to stress the importance of the Mental Health Awareness [Resolution] that we have both sponsored.

The truth is that too many of our seniors and, frankly, our general population continue to feel this heavy weight on their shoulders, and it is one that is palpable.

I think it's true at all ages. There's no doubt that the suicide rate amongst our youngest Americans is way too high, and the same is true with our seniors. I was talking to someone recently, just yesterday, and we were walking through one of my constituent calls—the rising crime and the officers that have been shot at a record level in the highest number of incidents focusing and targeting our officers in, frankly, the nation's history.

We watched in Buffalo another racist attack. You go to the gas pump, and in South Carolina, the gas prices doubled in less than two years. The fact of the matter is, if you're involved in an accident, which actually happened to the constituent's son yesterday, [there are] no rental cars. The parents who are looking for [baby] formula can't find it.

There are reasons why Americans feel a level of burden and stress and challenges. It's the fact that economically, crime, safety, security, loneliness... I think it was Surgeon General Murthy who said that loneliness is like smoking 15 cigarettes a day. And just thinking about that is a lot for the average person coming out of a pandemic. And the lingering effect is undeniable.

That's why I'm so thankful that Chairman Casey and I have worked diligently in a bipartisan fashion. There are many Americans who think nothing in Congress ever happens with the two sides coming together. [That is] simply false. The truth is, all that we accomplish in the United States Senate requires a bipartisan coalition, and that is a blessing to the great United States of America.

One of those is the AIM Act that Senator Casey has already described. Another one that I'm working on is the ACADEMIC Act. It authorizes a comprehensive study of the long-term impact of COVID-19 and associated school closures, especially on children from low-income families. This bill is sponsored by Senator Rubio, Chairman Casey, and myself. Substance abuse, of course, and overdose deaths are skyrocketing as a result of the mental health crisis that we've seen.

For the first time, overdoses have exceeded a hundred thousand in America, around 107,000—more than car accidents for the first time. The lifetime odds of dying from opioid overdose are now higher than those car accidents.

To tackle opioid misuse and raise awareness, South Carolina launched a campaign called Just Plain Killers, particularly among the aging population [who are] prescribed opioids for chronic pain. In addition to the substance abuse, many seniors were plagued, as Senator Casey said, with loneliness. And I will do my best not to reiterate what he has said unless it's just necessary. Sometimes it's necessary to emphasize or re-emphasize the importance of the challenges that so many of our seniors face.

Also, in addition to that, I mentioned the deaths of our law enforcement officers. And the worst situation for those officers is to go to a domestic situation. It's one of the reasons why in Richland County, law enforcement officers received over 2,700 calls just in a year related to mental health crisis, not a crime, but a crisis.

So we have legislation that focuses on the importance of co-responders so that you actually have officers and mental health experts going to the scene so that we can address the issues in the home without making it necessarily a crime.

These are some of the topics that we will discuss and some of the important issues that we will have to face as a bipartisan coalition of people who believe in the future of America, and we are going to get it done.

Thank you all for being experts and providing your expertise with us today.

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