



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Opening Statement of Chairman Chuck Grassley
Hearing, "Living Without Health Insurance: Who's Uninsured and Why?"
Tuesday, March 13, 2001

Today's hearing is the first in a two-part series to tackle the issues facing the 42 million Americans who go without health care coverage today. This is a hefty task, but it deserves our full attention. Specifically, the purpose of today's hearing is to understand who we are talking about when we say "uninsured Americans." To do this, we need to understand the special circumstances that contribute to the status of being uninsured. Age, ethnicity, employment status, and geographic location are some of the key factors.

No one will argue that it is unacceptable for 42 million Americans to go without health care coverage. For most of us, quality health care is an expectation. Whether it's regular check-ups or visits to specialists, it is often easy to take our health care coverage for granted. But we must remember that millions of Americans and their families are not so lucky.

Many individuals and families struggle to stay healthy with little or no access to health care services. We are fortunate that our nation has invested mightily in achieving the best health care system in the world. As a result, health care practitioners across the country are treating millions of Americans every day with the most advanced technology and science. And, Americans are experiencing longer, healthier lives than ever before. But we cannot settle with having a world-class health care system that leaves 42 million Americans behind.

In recent years, Congress has been working in incremental ways to ensure that Americans have access to affordable, high-quality health care. We can look at successes such as the State Children's Health Insurance program and know that three million more children are now getting the health care coverage they need and deserve. The passage of Kassebaum-Kennedy in 1996 was an important step toward ensuring continuous health coverage. Barriers to health care have finally been removed for adults with disabilities who want to work but feared losing health coverage. And low-income women who suffer from breast cancer now have access to treatment. These incremental improvements have made a big difference in the lives of millions of Americans. But there is a great deal of work still to be done.

The task before us today is to learn more about our nation's uninsured population so we can continue down the road toward finding solutions. We have joining us a panel of experts who understand the intricate details of the uninsured population. I thank all of you for your participation this afternoon. As we will hear in their testimony, the uninsured population is extraordinarily diverse, and its members face many different challenges in finding health care coverage.

Later this week, the committee will convene for a second hearing on the uninsured. At that time, we will turn our attention to studying possible solutions. I look forward to continuing a dialogue in this committee about the uninsured and invite my colleagues to work together to find solutions.

