

**Opening Statement
Senator Susan M. Collins
Special Committee on Aging**

“The State of Play: Brain Injuries and Diseases of Aging”

June 25, 2014

Chairman Nelson, thank you for calling this important hearing to examine the relationship between traumatic brain injury and diseases associated with aging such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and Lou Gehrig’s disease, or ALS.

Traumatic Brain Injury, or TBI, affects five million Americans at an annual cost of more than \$76 billion. As the Senate Co-Chair of the Congressional Task Force on Alzheimer’s, I am particularly interested in the research conducted

over the past three decades that has linked moderate and severe traumatic brain injury to a greater risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

One troubling study cited by the Alzheimer's Association found that older individuals with a history of moderate traumatic brain injury are more than twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's disease than seniors with no history of brain injury. Those with a history of severe traumatic brain injury were found to have a 4.5 times greater risk.

Finding a way to prevent and effectively treat

Alzheimer's disease is among my highest priorities in the U.S. Senate, and it is also a priority for our Committee. Last year, we held a hearing to assess the progress made in combating Alzheimer's disease since the enactment of the National Alzheimer's Project Act. Today's hearing builds upon our Committee's work.

In many ways, Alzheimer's disease is the defining disease of the baby boom generation. If we are to prevent it from becoming the defining disease of the next generation, we must strengthen our commitment to research leading to a better understanding of this devastating disease. While

researchers still have a great deal to learn about how head injuries affect an individual's risk of developing neurologic diseases like Alzheimer's later in life, there is increasing evidence of a strong relationship.

Studies also suggest that women, even more than men, may be more likely to experience long-term symptoms, such as cognitive and visual impairments, after sustaining a serious head injury. We know that currently, almost two-thirds of Americans living with Alzheimer's disease are women.

There are many important research projects being conducted on TBI and the link to neurological diseases. For example, the National Institutes of Health and the National Football League have embarked upon a \$60 million, four-year, public-private partnership to advance research that may lead to the improvement of TBI diagnosis through better imaging technologies, and also improve treatment for those who have sustained serious head injuries.

Indeed, while those who have participated in contact sports or served in the military may face a particular risk for TBI and related health conditions, the leading cause of TBI among seniors

is falls. According to the CDC, individuals over age 65 have the highest rates of TBI-related hospitalizations and death.

More research is required to establish definitively that there is a link between head injuries and neurological diseases later in life, but it is clear that this important research could lead to a better understanding of devastating diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and ALS. This critical research could also benefit our veterans and troops on the ground, far too many of whom have experienced TBI and its painful lasting effects.

Mr. Chairman, the panel of witnesses that we

will hear from today will give our Committee great insight into this topic and the status of current research efforts. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.