

Good afternoon. This Committee has taken a look at the financial security of Americans in retirement from a variety of angles. We have examined the difficulty the average senior faces in making ends meet in retirement and how some have turned to risky products like payday loans or been enticed by scams.

Today we're looking at student loan debt and how it puts the retirement security of our nation's seniors at risk. While many may think of student loan debt as just a young person's problem, increasingly it's not the case.

As we'll hear from the GAO today, a significant number of older Americans still have student loans debt from financing their own college education. And what happens to these folks when they hit retirement age is frightening. Those in default on their loans can see their Social Security checks garnished, leaving them with retirement income that leaves them well below the federal poverty line.

Take the case of Janet Lee Dupree, a 72-year-old Ocala, Florida, resident. In the early 1970s, she took out a \$3,000 loan to finance her undergraduate degree. While she recognizes that she didn't pay the original loan when she should have, she has now paid thousands of dollars on this loan and today owes \$15,000 due to compound interest and penalties. She is in poor health and will never be able to pay off this sum, especially because all she can afford is the 50 dollars the government takes out of her Social Security check every month.

Large amounts of any kind of debt can put a person's finances at risk, but I think Ms. Dupree's story shows that student debt has real consequences for those in or near retirement. And, the need to juggle debt on a fixed income may increase the likelihood of student loan default.

So in today's hearing we would like to achieve a few things:

- Educate the public, especially seniors or those nearing retirement to think about the amount of student loan debt they incur;
- Help people with student loan debt understand the options they have for staying current on their payments without descending into poverty; and
- Highlight any obstacles that might get in the way of their doing that.

And with that, I'd like to turn to my colleague Sen. Collins for her opening remarks.