

**Opening Statement of Senator Herb Kohl
Special Committee on Aging Minority Hearing
Catch Me If You Can: Solutions to STOP Medicare and Medicaid Fraud from
Hurting Seniors and Taxpayers
May 6, 2009**

Good afternoon. I'd like to start by thanking Ranking Member Martinez for holding today's hearing on the topic of Medicare and Medicaid fraud.

The high cost of health care is rapidly depleting the Medicare Trust Fund, crushing state Medicaid budgets, and bankrupting working families who cannot afford health insurance. Health care fraud robs patients and providers of the precious resources they need. According to one estimate, Medicare and Medicaid fraud cost the government \$72 billion last year. Clearly, we need to make sure that every dollar spent by a public or private health plan goes to quality health care, not to line the pockets of a scam artist or criminal.

I am eager to hear from today's witnesses about how we can best put a stop to these types of fraud. I am especially interested in innovative ideas that will put us ahead of the curve in terms of detecting fraudulent schemes before they are carried out. If we can detect improper claims before they are paid and address weaknesses in our own system more efficiently, we can save time and money that is currently spent on chasing down bad payments that have already been made.

Senator Martinez and I have been working closely with the Finance and HELP Committees as part of a bipartisan group on this issue. Specifically, we are drafting proposals to address the problem of health care fraud as an essential component of health care reform, including measures to improve the detection and prevention of fraud, waste, and abuse, and to provide law enforcement with sufficient tools to investigate and prosecute criminal schemes. We believe it is our obligation to protect the integrity of Medicare and Medicaid, and ensure that our government's resources are defended against dishonesty and misuse.