

## **SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING**

### **FORUM**

#### ***Keeping America's Seniors Moving: Examining Ways to Improve Senior Transportation***

**July 21, 2003**

First, I'd like to thank the Chairman for conducting this forum on senior transportation issues. I commend Senator Craig for his leadership and commitment to examining ways to improve safety with respect to older American drivers and to exploring ways to improve how this country approaches senior transportation.

Baby boomers are aging and medical advances are allowing people to live longer – and drive longer. But we have yet to grapple with how to keep up with the increasing number of older drivers on the roads. The number of elderly drivers is higher than ever – and will continue to increase. For some older drivers, additional testing may be in order to ensure their safety, as well as the safety of others. However, if older Americans reach a point where they stop driving, we need to provide creative ways to insure their continued independence. This forum today is an important step toward focusing the attention of Congress on the needs of our aging drivers and beginning to fashion new solutions.

There are approximately 18.5 million drivers on the road who are over the age of 71. One of every five drivers will be 65 or older in 2030. Several stories highlight the disastrous consequences of seniors driving when they maybe they should not. National news is covering an older gentleman in Santa Monica, California crashed into a busy market, killing eight people. His initial explanation was that he confused the

accelerator and the brake. Another story that I've come across recounts how a 71 year old driving from New York to Florida got lost in Maryland. It was discovered that the man had meandered all the way to Texas after dropping off a woman and her four children that he met in a Florida K-Mart in New York. He had been stopped by highway patrol in several states and had been in an accident in Texas but had no idea how to get home to Florida. In yet another tragic story, an 87 year old man and his 82 year old wife were driving in the rural foothills near Fresno, California, when they drove into a ravine. The wife left to find help but couldn't remember where the car was. Her husband died as a result of this incident.

Sadly, the incident in Santa Monica has focused the debate. Some are calling for more licensing restrictions on older drivers. Other organizations oppose taking older drivers off the road. They believe we should find ways to help them drive more safely. Hopefully, everyone agrees that we must find ways to ensure the dignity and independence of our seniors by providing creative solutions to their transportation needs as they age.

Various studies are underway on this subject. The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration is pursuing projects that will aid us in better identifying the problem. Maryland's Department of Motor Vehicles is examining how age affects skills. At the Michigan Institute of Technology, efforts are underway to develop a "smart car." These are only a few of the efforts underway.

By the year 2030, about 7 million baby boomers, age 85 and older, are expected to have stopped driving. These individuals will be forced to rely on other forms of transportation, according to a study by the National Institute on Aging. The study predicts that women will spend approximately a decade finding other ways to get to the doctor or on a host of other necessary errands. The study predicts that men will spend

approximately six years finding other modes of transportation after they stop driving.

I look forward to the discussion today. I am confident that the record that begins at this congressional forum will serve the Congress well. Again, I thank Senator Craig for calling this forum and look forward to reviewing the record that develops.