

Statement of Senator Larry E. Craig
Senate Special Committee on Aging
“Baby Boomers at the Gate: Enhancing
Independence through Innovation and Technology”
May 20, 2003

Good Afternoon... I am pleased to convene this hearing in recognition of Older Americans Month and to explore a wide range of policy issues impacting older Americans and their families. Such an ongoing dialogue is imperative since the first wave of baby boomers will turn 60 in less than three years. Today, we will hear testimony from various innovative thinkers. We will hear about the Older Americans Act and the Family Caregiver program; a new approach to Medicaid service delivery; plans for modernizing our nation's Senior Centers; and the technological opportunities available to seniors.

It is estimated that in 2006, over 3 million baby boomers will turn 60 and become eligible for older Americans' services. This new wave of seniors will have a very different set of characteristics from the previous generation. It is therefore critical that we in Congress review and design national policies to address these new demands.

I believe the central strategy for meeting the new challenges in the 21st Century is that of innovation...new and bold programs and technology that enhance independence for all older Americans. Today, testimony will highlight some of these innovations.

We will hear about the Older Americans Act and its newest addition, “The National Family Caregiver Program”. It is well known that family caregivers are on the front lines of long-term care for older persons in this country. It is important that this program continues to evolve and assist family caregivers so they can meet the challenges of caring for loved ones in their own homes. A new approach in providing these services to the caregivers will be shared with us today.

I am looking forward to the testimony on the Medicaid consumer-directed services pilot project, a new concept that allows seniors and their families to direct their own care. An example of a self-directed service is the “Cash and Counseling” program which allows older persons who have trouble managing their finances to hire a financial manager of their choice.

National Senior Center Week, which ended last Sunday, was a national recognition of the importance of Senior Centers. Of equal importance is the need to vigorously explore a new vision for our nation's Senior Centers. Although Senior Centers are created and funded at the local level, they serve as critical delivery points for various Older Americans Act services. I look forward to testimony on how Senior Centers will evolve to meet the interests and demands of a new generation of older Americans in the 21st Century.

And finally, assistive technologies are also becoming a major tool for older Americans. Today, promising areas of computer to human interaction that will allow older Americans to live more independently will be discussed.