

Opening Statement of Senator Herb Kohl

June 27, 2006

Special Committee on Aging Hearing

"The Globalization of Health Care: Can Medical Tourism Reduce Health Care Costs"

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing. We welcome all of our witnesses and look forward to their testimony.

"Medical tourism" – or the practice of traveling to other countries to receive discounted medical procedures – is taking off in the United States, raising a number of questions for this panel. What is driving health care costs to such a height that Americans are seeking care overseas? How has the crisis of the uninsured in this country reached such a peak that some find foreign travel for medical procedures more practical than health insurance? Finally, how are we protecting Americans who do travel overseas from fraud, incompetent providers and most importantly poor health outcomes?

The United States accounts for \$1.7 trillion of the \$3.3 trillion spent annually for health care worldwide yet ranks 37th worldwide in quality of care. Even more unsettling: there are 45 million Americans without any form of health insurance. As we hear from our witnesses today about Americans who have chosen to escape our health care system, we are also reminded of the how much we have left to do to provide every American with affordable, quality health care here at home.

I look forward to hearing from our panel on both the benefits and risks of medical tourism. Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing.