

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



RANKING MEMBER *Special Committee on Aging*

Sen. Casey's Opening Statement

"Financial Security in Retirement: Innovations and Best Practices to Promote Savings" February 6, 2019

"Thank you, Chairman Collins, for holding this hearing today on this incredibly important subject.

"Having financial security in retirement is a goal for each and every family in America. All of us hope that when we reach old age, we will be able to enjoy retirement on our own terms. But the reality is that millions of American families are approaching retirement with almost nothing saved. And despite working hard their whole lives, too many seniors are finding themselves barely able to make ends meet.

"According to the GAO, roughly one in four households ages 65 to 74 have zero retirement savings of any kind. And many others have managed to save only a fraction of what they will need. Some are living in fear of seeing significant cuts to a pension they have planned their lives around. The truth is that our retirement system does well for some, but it allows millions of Americans to fall through the cracks.

"As we'll hear today, this is particularly true when it comes to women, who on average have lower retirement incomes and are more likely to live in poverty when in old age. And it's true for people who lack access to savings options at work and those who did earn retirement benefits at work but now live in danger of seeing them cut.

"Our nation deserves better, more secure retirement options. We can start by strengthening the backbone of our nation's retirement system, Social Security itself. We must ensure that Social Security is able to keep the promise of financial security in retirement. We must not let Americans relying upon Social Security slide into poverty.

"That's why today I am introducing a bill to boost Social Security benefits for women who are the most likely to end up in poverty. Widows and widows with disabilities are significantly more likely to live in poverty in old age than are other Social Security recipients. The bill is the Surviving Widow Income Fair Treatment Act, which would eliminate arbitrary claiming rules and caps that substantially reduce a widow's benefits. I'm pleased that a number of my colleagues have joined in introducing this bill, two members of this committee in fact, Senators Blumenthal and Gillibrand.

"In addition to strengthening Social Security, we must ensure that promises to workers relying upon pensions are kept. Workers across the country, including tens of thousands in my home state of Pennsylvania, fear the pensions they have earned will be dramatically cut through no fault of their own. Congress must act immediately to keep multiemployer pensions solvent.

“And finally, we must work to ensure that our retirement savings system works for all Americans. We must work to expand access to workplace retirement plans. And we must make tax incentives for retirement savings, like the Saver’s Credit, useful to the families who actually need it the most.

“We must approach these problems in a comprehensive fashion that ensures that all workers can participate and that all workers receive the benefits they have earned.

“I would also like to quickly note that for today’s hearing, we are pleased to be represented at the witness table by so many with Pennsylvania roots. Linda Stone is from Bryn Mawr, and does a lot of her work obviously in Pennsylvania. The [GAO] Comptroller General is here who has roots in Pennsylvania and who graduated from Lycoming College. John Scott has two degrees from Pennsylvania schools and we’re happy about that. Both Penn State and, Penn State and Swarthmore. And before the hearing is over probably someone else will stand up and claim Pennsylvania roots.

“But Chairman Collins I’ll try not to dwell on that but we are grateful for the time you set aside for this hearing on this critical issue. Thanks very much.”

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