

SENATOR HERB KOHL (D-WI)

Chairman of the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

Statement on the Wisconsin Elder Economic Security Initiative July 8, 2008

It is an unfortunate fact that many, many Americans are not enjoying a financially secure retirement, and instead are struggling to survive on Social Security. For twenty percent of seniors over 65 years old, Social Security is their only source of income, and for two-thirds, it is their major source of income. Their monthly check from the government must stretch to pay their rent, buy groceries, and afford prescription drugs. These benefits alone may not keep the recipients above the current poverty level.

Of those who are trying to stay afloat, a majority are women. Elderly women currently comprise the largest segment of Americans living in poverty. For many reasons, older women are at a financial disadvantage when it comes to retirement security. One contributing factor could be their time spent out of the workforce as they raised a family. Also, due to pay discrimination, women earn less on average over a lifetime than men do. Compounding these disadvantages is the fact that with a longer life expectancy, women often must stretch their retirement savings further.

Given these realities, the most important thing our government can do to help older Americans economically is to maintain and strengthen Social Security. With life-long payments and progressive structure, Social Security remains the bedrock of retirement security and is crucial to keeping millions of elderly women out of poverty.