

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS HEARING ENTITLED, "IN THE HANDS OF STRANGERS: ARE NURSING HOME SAFEGUARDS WORKING?"

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May 15, 2008

Today's hearing focuses on the quality of nursing homes and how new types of ownership affect this vital industry. As an original sponsor of the 1987 Nursing Home Reform Act, I want this critical law to effectively protect those who must live in nursing homes, and I commend Chairman Stupak for holding this hearing today.

The nursing home industry has radically changed since the 1987 law was enacted. Nursing homes are an industry with new investors and new financing and ownership structures. This new dynamic raises serious questions about whether profits are being placed before the needs of nursing home residents.

I look forward to the testimony of the Acting Administrator Weems of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) about what CMS needs in order to better oversee and improve the quality of nursing homes.

In some ways, the quality of care in our Nation's nursing homes has improved over the last 20 years, but there is still a ways to go. More than 20 years ago Congress sought to establish minimum standards for care and quality of life for every nursing home resident. It is disturbing that a subset of today's nursing homes appears unable to avoid harm to residents. This hearing will receive testimony from Federal, State, and municipal authorities about the failure of some nursing homes in meeting the basic standards and why they cannot be held accountable.

I thank Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal for being here today. He will testify about a New England nursing home chain with a troubled history of understaffing, poor care, and unpaid debts. Also testifying today will be the inspector general for HHS, who will

identify ways CMS can more effectively protect nursing home residents.

The day-to-day care for the frail, elderly, and disabled is a difficult and often thankless job. It takes a special person to care for those who cannot care for themselves. No one knows this better than the 500,000 dedicated nursing home workers of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). I thank them for their efforts, and for leading the fight for ensuring quality health care for every American.

I also applaud those industry leaders who have advocated for higher standards. I particularly wish to recognize my friend, Bruce Yarwood, President of the American Health Care Association (AHCA), as one of those leaders who has set the bar high through the "Advancing Excellence" campaign.

And finally, I welcome Mrs. Aceituno, who will share her story about her husband's experiences in a facility that she trusted would keep him safe. Mr. Aceituno became paralyzed while a resident of this facility and is now confined to a wheelchair. I know that this is not easy for Mrs. Aceituno, but we are grateful to her for putting a human face on what can happen when nursing home owners place profits before the people in their care.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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