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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
“The Implementation and Sustainability of the New, Government-Administered
Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Program”
Subcommittee on Health
March 17, 2011

Today’s hearing is about much more than the nuts and bolts of the CLASS Program. At its core, this meeting is about an issue that has touched virtually every person in this room, public and private alike – the indignity, the burden, and the expense of long term care services and supports and our lack of a decent, reasonable, and accessible program for those in need of this kind of assistance.

The problem has been with us for a long time. And it is growing. With the aging of the Baby Boomers, the numbers are, indeed, quite staggering – I’m sure we will hear much to that point from today’s witnesses. But rather than facing the challenge, we have pushed the problem aside year after year, pledging to those in need that with just a bit more time, we would get a good program in place.

Almost one year ago, we finally kept that promise. In creating the CLASS Program – a voluntary, self-sustaining, privately-financed, and beneficiary-driven effort – we set in motion a process that will allow the elderly and the disabled to be able to stay in their homes and in their communities when they are no longer able to do so independently.

Shame on those who would take this promise away.

Having said that, all of us who support the CLASS Program – members of Congress, HHS, and even advocacy organizations – all readily agree that much work needs to be done before the program is ready to go “live” in 2012. That is what the two years of preparation time and the Secretarial discretion and flexibility provided for in the enacting legislation is all about.

So let us get on with that task. Let us learn today about where the program is and where the program is going – and how it plans to get there. And let us be assured that the requirements of the law will, in fact, be met.

But along the way, let us not forget who and what brought us to this point – the Tony Youngs of America; their families; and the discouraging and often devastating experience of simply wanting to “stay put” and remain engaged and productive, and being told that’s not possible.

The CLASS program is designed to change all that. Let’s give CLASS that chance and keep our promise to those who have waited so long for meaningful relief.