



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Opening Remarks of Sen. Chuck Grassley
for Joint Finance/HELP Committee Forum Regarding the Future of Retirement
Tuesday, March 15, 2005

I want to begin by extending a very warm welcome to all of the participants – many of whom have come from far away, including Dan Houston from Principal Financial in my home state of Iowa – to share their insights on the future of our private retirement plan system. The people we have in this room really are the experts. They bring a wealth of experience and insight. They bring a perspective on how things operate in the “real world” outside of the Beltway. And they all are here today because they share one goal – improving our private retirement system and the retirement security of Americans everywhere. Thank you to all of you for making time to be here today. This is a year in which retirement security has taken a central place in our national dialogue. With the baby boom generation on the cusp of retirement, this dialogue could not be more timely. For his part, the President has advanced this dialogue by asking us to look at ways to strengthen and modernize Social Security.

But we all know that a secure retirement depends on more than just Social Security. Employment-based retirement plans and private savings are the other two critical legs of our three-legged retirement stool. Here today, we will focus attention on those other two legs. And we will focus our attention not just on where we are today, but where we should be going tomorrow. Too often, here in Congress, we find ourselves responding to the latest crisis, or trying to do “damage control” when we become aware that problems exist. Today, we have an opportunity to get out of “reactive mode” and look proactively to the future. I am pleased also to be here today with Chairman Enzi and Senator Baucus and Senator Kennedy. We all know that the only way to get things done in the United States Senate is to work together. We’ve had great success in recent years working on retirement security in a bipartisan manner. In the 1990s, we passed a series of bipartisan pension reforms that began to breathe new life into our private retirement system. In the bipartisan 2001 tax relief bill, we enacted a bipartisan and far-reaching set of retirement savings reforms. This year, I hope we can work together in a bipartisan way to strengthen Social Security. At the same time, I hope we can work on a “next generation” of retirement reforms, including: making the 2001 retirement savings reforms permanent; protecting workers’ retirement plan benefits by making sure that pension plans are fully funded and that 401(k) participants have the right to diversify out of company stock; and expanding savings opportunities for all Americans.

And as we look farther into the future here today, I hope that we can continue to work in a bipartisan spirit on these issues, so that we can confront head-on the challenges that we know are sure to lie ahead.