

Crapo Statement at Hearing on COVID-19 in Nursing Homes

March 17, 2021

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, delivered the following remarks at a hearing entitled, “A National Tragedy: COVID-19 in the Nation’s Nursing Homes.”

The text of Ranking Member Crapo’s remarks, as prepared, is below.

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

“At the national, state and local levels, the pandemic has challenged our sense of normalcy.

“It has tested every institution of daily life we know, threatening the physical and economic health of our nation.

“Americans from all walks of life have experienced a year full of tremendous hardship and tragedy.

“It is the people living and working in our nation’s nursing homes, however, who bore an outsized burden.

“More than 174,000 people died as COVID-19 ravaged our long-term care facilities.

“That number represents almost one-third of all U.S. deaths that have occurred during the pandemic.

“Both long-stay nursing homes and short-stay post-acute skilled nursing facilities rely on direct care workers – such as licensed practical nurses, certified nursing assistants and personal care aides – to provide most hands-on care.

“These workers are in close physical contact with residents, assisting with bathing, dressing and eating.

“Current data shows that long-term care workers are typically female and a disproportionate share are women of color.

“Many of these direct care workers live paycheck to paycheck.

“Over the past year, they have put their lives on the line.

“We owe them a debt of gratitude.

“Thank you to the dedicated nursing home workers like Adelina Ramos, one of our witnesses.

“These workers hear Americans calling them heroes, but they are often underappreciated when on the job.

“To these frontline workers, please know that the sacrifices you are making every day do not go unnoticed or unappreciated.

“Today, we will hear from a number of expert witnesses who will provide key insights into nursing home conditions over the past year.

“This testimony will help us better understand exactly what happened, when it happened and why it happened.

“It will give us insight into policies that produced results, as well as areas that need improvement.

“Hearings are just one oversight tool this Committee uses to hold government agencies, the health care industry and individual providers accountable.

“Another key part of oversight is securing reliable and accurate data.

“Transparent data reporting brings accountability and helps drive decision-making.

“As we look to the future, it is vital that all states report accurate COVID-19 data.

“That is the only way for economists, researchers, advocacy organizations and policymakers to tackle the challenges facing the nursing home sector head-on.

“This is not a job for the federal government alone.

“Multiple federal, state, and local programs and partnerships work to support the health care needs of our nation’s most vulnerable populations.

“We must work together – in an honest and transparent manner – to safeguard our nursing home residents and the workers who care for them.

“Over the weekend, the New York Times published the results of an investigation into the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) nursing home five-star rating system.

“The investigation questions the objectivity and accuracy of the CMS star ratings system.

“This rating system, which was first implemented during the Obama Administration, is designed to help beneficiaries, their families, and caregivers compare nursing home quality more easily.

“Care Compare is another online tool available to help seniors, the disabled, and their families find out if a particular nursing home facility meets federal health and safety standards, staffing levels, and quality performance metrics.

“After several bipartisan hearings held by the Finance Committee during 2019, CMS implemented changes to Nursing Home Compare that specifically denote nursing homes that have been cited for incidents of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

“That may have been a start, but clearly there is a lot more work that needs to be done.

“I am grateful to each of our witnesses for the work that they are doing and for taking the time to join us today.

“Their expertise will help us advance public policies that slow the spread of COVID-19, and lessen its devastating impacts on our nation’s elderly and the disabled.”

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