

WASHINGTON, DC (May 25, 2010) – Rep. Jan Schakowsky (IL-9) released the following remarks as prepared for delivery today at the first roundtable of the [Congressional Seniors' Task Force of the Democratic Caucus](#)

. The discussion was held to address economic issues facing American seniors and to lay the groundwork for future legislative solutions. Attendees included legislators, experts and seniors advocates.

Welcome to the first of what will be several roundtables hosted by the Seniors Task Force. Today's topic, seniors and the economy, could not come at a better time.

As we begin to show signs of growth and resurgence in our economy, it is absolutely critical that we keep the unique needs of our nation's aging Americans in mind so that the recovery works for them, too.

I'd like to thank the Democratic Caucus for their help organizing this event, and Nancy LeaMond with AARP for moderating today.

I would also like to extend a special thanks to all of the wonderful participants that have gathered here today.

We've got policy wonks, and we've got organizations who work in the field. Collectively you bring both a macro and micro expertise to the issues that weigh on older Americans' minds every day, and I appreciate your willingness to participate in what I hope is a collaborative and honest discussion.

On May 6<sup>th</sup>, in honor of Older Americans Month, Congresswoman Doris Matsui and I, along with many of our peers in the Democratic Caucus, launched the Seniors Task Force.

On that day, we presented our core belief that every senior in this country – regardless of their economic circumstance – has the fundamental basic right to age with dignity. House Resolution 1342 embodies the [Seniors Bill of Rights](#), with over 50 Members who have signed on and counting.

As the Bill of Rights states, our seniors have the right to financial security, to affordable health and long term care. They have a right to a strong economy, free of scam artists who try to feed off of any wealth they have managed to save. And our seniors have a right to safe and livable communities that foster an ability to stay within their homes and communities for as long as possible.

For many of us these are no-brainer rights; but too often, particularly during this recession, we have seen a different reality: Older Americans who lost a good chunk of their savings over the course of a month, or who have spent the past year and a half trying to scrap together enough to retire.

According to Experience Works, 68% of older Americans who work today are doing so because their retirement income is not enough to live on.

One out of ten senior citizens lives below the poverty line. And over the past 20 years, the rate of bankruptcy among those 65 and older has doubled.

My colleagues in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress and I have worked to put the needs of seniors first.

We have strengthened our health care system to improve benefits to older Americans and extend the solvency of Medicare.

We are cracking down on predatory lending practices that target our most vulnerable and trusting populations – like seniors who try to stay in a home that has lost half of its value over the past year.

And we passed a stimulus package – that we must now build upon – that provided critical funding for programs geared towards seniors, like nutrition and weatherization programs.

But we all know that more must be done in order to keep our promise to this nation's seniors, which is why I am pleased to have this roundtable today. I think we are in for a frank discussion about where the needs lie, and about what we should be doing in order to meet the needs of an aging population during this unique time.

I would like to start today's roundtable with a brief presentation by Nancy LeaMond, the Executive Vice President of Social Impact at AARP, who will talk with us about some of the myths versus facts when it comes to our nation's seniors.

It is a sad reality that many people in this country who are not that familiar with our nation's seniors see Social Security and Medicare as a free ticket to wealth.

When they think of older Americans, they don't see any of the struggles to pay the mortgage and medical bills while caring for an ailing spouse, a child who needs extra help, or a grandchild that needs a stable family.

Instead, they see in their mind a smiling and tan grandfatherly figure going off to play golf every day in the Boca Raton. That's not the rosy picture many of our seniors are living in, as we will hear from Nancy.

Nancy is an advocate who has worked on the Hill, in the field, and in the Clinton White House. She now directs Divided We Fail, a collaborative effort with AARP, the Business Roundtable, SEIU, and the National Federation of Independent Business that aims to put health care and financial security at the top of this nation's agenda. She is going to get us started with a short presentation, and will then serve as moderator for the roundtable.

Thank you all for joining us today. I look forward to our continued work together.

