

REMARKS OF SENATOR JOHN HEINZ (R-PA)
10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
BERWICK RETIREMENT VILLAGE NURSING HOME
BERWICK, PA
AUGUST 26, 1988

Today we are planting a young tree, to stand as a symbol of the Berwick Retirement Village's commitment to quality of life and continued personal growth of the residents of this home. Of course, planting this tree commits us, as well, to its care and nurture in future years.

Twenty-three years ago, Congress planted a pair of saplings with much the same purpose: we called them Medicare and Medicaid. They have become a literally life saving preserve, and expanse of hospital and health care that has branched out to protect some 35 million older Americans. But as with this tree, these programs have required strong support and careful nurture to ensure their dependability and growth so they might provide health security for those who would otherwise face a future of unattended illness and poverty, isolation and despair. On July 1st of this year, we planted yet another major addition when President Reagan signed the most recent of our efforts, the Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act of 1988. But we still need to be sure that we see the forest for the trees.

Throughout our recent consideration of legislation to protect older Americans from catastrophic health costs, we heard repeatedly that the greatest financial risk borne by the elderly is long term care. Yes, we have taken some significant steps toward improved coverage with the catastrophic care legislation. Our new legislation improves the short term Home Health and Skilled Nursing Facility benefits provided by Medicare. It provides a respite care benefit, will eventually pay 80% of the cost of prescription drugs above \$600 threshold, and limits the total out of pocket cost that -- until now -- could bankrupt and leave in poverty even the most secure middle income family. But helpful as this legislation is in providing for short-term acute care costs, our health care safety net still leaves American families facing the even greater financial catastrophe of a long-term, chronic illness.

The marvelous advances in the prevention and treatment of life-threatening illness are allowing nearly every American the prospect of many more years of life, free from many of the disabling ailments we traditionally associate with growing old. But our growing life expectancy includes a cost -- that when, in more advanced years, we do get ill, we will be sicker for longer before we recover.

The challenge is not only to develop affordable access to long-term care, but how to do so in a way that ensures both the quality of care given and the quality of life for the resident or patient and their spouse and/or family caregivers.

The threat of spousal impoverishment is very real. About half of the residents of this nursing home are on medicaid, and for the surviving spouse, this means having virtually no savings in an account to fall back on...and very little income to get by on. It is a tragic fact that under our existing health care system that if you have an illness like cancer, which can kill you, you and your spouse are largely protected by medicare. But if one or the other is stricken with alzheimers, then the healthy spouse has one of two alternatives: pauperization and ending a life of dignity in poverty...or divorce from a cherished wife or husband of 40 or 50 years. We must give our seniors a humane choice, not a Hobson's choice.

Just as important is the quality of care given by the provider.

Here at the Berwick Retirement Village, not only is the Administrator a registered nurse, but a skilled nurse is on duty 24 hours a day. I am told each one is trained in CPR. As I recently learned and released to the public, most nursing homes promise that a qualified nurse will be on duty no more than eight hours

a day. Further, up to 80% of nursing homes have no on-duty staff trained in CPR. That means, quite literally, that if you have a heart attack, you have a far better chance of getting CPR on the sidewalk than in the average nursing home.

We are not going to solve these problems here today. But they are the kinds of problems that we must see for the trees so none of us becomes lost, isolated and desperate in the forest.

We are fortunate to have, in the Berwick Retirement Village, an example of what can be accomplished. What the board and staff, what the volunteers and residents and their families have achieved here in a forceful reminder of what vision, hardwork and caring can accomplish.

It should be and is an inspiration to us all. To try harder. To think better. To care more. And for 10 years of such service and leadership by example I thank you and congratulate you.