

**Statement Of**  
**LUCILLE OLSON**  
**before the**  
**U. S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations**  
**St. Paul, Minnesota Field Hearing**  
**Hearing On**  
*Volatility in the Natural Gas Market:*  
*The Impact of High Natural Gas Prices On American Consumers*  
**February 13, 2006**

Good morning Senator Coleman, my name is Lucille Olson. At 75 years of age, I am like many seniors who are widowed and trying to live on a fixed income with high costs for health insurance and prescription drugs. My expenses for the most basic needs are rising far faster than my income and my heating costs are no exception.

I married my husband Ken in 1959 and we purchased our home the following year. I have lived there ever since. Our home was built in the 1920s. Ken was a teamster with Murphy Motor Freight Lines and I worked for White manufacturing when we married. After our daughter was born, I decided to quit my job and care for my family. Several years ago, the copper water pipes in our home started leaking and we were told that they needed to be replaced. Ken and I took out a \$50,000 home equity loan and used the money to replace our water pipes and remodel our home. After that Ken went blind from macular degeneration and I cared for him. Following a series of other health-related problems, Ken passed away last October. When Ken died, I lost his pension and social security income which had been \$1,772 per month. I am now trying to live on my Social Security which is \$1,022 a month.

I have a number of prescriptions that my doctor has prescribed for several health problems I have. If I had no insurance, my prescriptions would cost me \$877 per month. My health insurance under Medicare is \$104 per month and I am required to make co-pays on my prescriptions which range from \$6 to \$25. My total co-pays can run as high as \$101 per month. So before I even buy food, make a mortgage payment on my home equity loan or pay my heating bill, I have already spent about 20 percent of my monthly income on my health needs. Last December my heating bill for the month was \$274 and this December it was \$366. That is a 34 percent increase and represents over 30 percent of my monthly income. The \$366 bill does not include what I would have to pay if I were not receiving energy assistance through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

Things have gotten so bad for me financially, that I am getting a reverse mortgage on my home so I can pay my bills. I would prefer to leave my home to my daughter but that is not an option for me. If you have any questions, I would be pleased to answer them.

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