SENATE TAXATION
EXHIBIT NO. 13
DATE 2-1-05
BILL NO. 332

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE TAXATION COMMITTEE
Senate Bill 332
FEBRUARY 1, 2005

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to give this testimony.

My name is Charles Aagenes and I am the Director of the Area IV Agency on Aging based here in Helena. This Area Agency serves the six counties of Broadwater, Gallatin, Lewis & Clark, Jefferson, Meagher and Park.

I am thankful that Senator Ryan has introduced Senate Bill 332 as a means to raise needed revenue to fund services for senior citizens. This bill is not about the revenue but is about the needs of our elders in Montana. The slogan **"A Nickel a pop for our Moms and Pops"** highlights what is needed and whom it is needed for. About 28 percent of our population aged 65 and over are categorized as poor or low income. Area Agencies on Aging will provide services to people of any economic status but it is primarily the poor or low income that seeks help because they cannot afford to pay for services.

My father is 87 years old, lives in his own home in Billings, stays pretty active and is relatively healthy. He fits right on this line between poor and low income. So long as he and his wife stay pretty healthy they can get along just fine. Any serious illness could quickly make them poor, even with Medicare – and don't expect that Medicare prescription drug coverage will solve this problem. Like my father, many Montana elders worked hard all their lives at middle-income jobs before the advent of retirement accounts. These elders are the ones who, through no fault of their own, have lived beyond their savings. A disproportionate share of women are low income and you would be surprised how many of them sort of get by on as little as $600 to $700 per month.

Area Agencies on Aging are advocacy organizations for senior citizen needs. The more commonly know services are congregate meals and "meals on wheels", senior transportation, and caregiver services in a persons home. But the list goes on: There is Information & Assistance services, Senior Centers, Home & Community Based Case Management, Homemaker services, Ombudsman Services, Respite Care, Elder Abuse Prevention and

many others. All of these services are intended to help our elders have long, healthy, productive and independent lives.

Funding for these services in Montana has not kept pace with increasing costs as well as the large increase in Montanans who live past 85. Now is the time to raise the money for current needs as well as to put some away in the Older Montanans Trust Fund for future needs.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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