

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
MINORITY (202) 225-5074

<http://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement Chairman Elijah E. Cummings

Hearing on "The Patient Perspective: The Devastating Impacts of Skyrocketing Drug Prices on American Families"

July 26, 2019

Today we are closing this work period the way we started our work this Congress—with a hearing on prescription drug prices. This is a bipartisan issue that I have focused on for years. The first witness at our first hearing this Congress was Antoinette Worsham, a mother whose daughter died after rationing insulin because she could not afford it. And it was the subject of our hearing on the HIV prevention drug in May.

Today, five patients and family member are here to share their stories. I urge all members to go back to your districts and talk to your constituents about their experiences struggling to pay for life-saving drugs. I fear you will discover that we are facing a drug pricing crisis in this country.

We have seen it time and time again. Drug companies' skyrocketing prices are forcing families to make gut-wrenching choices.

Many families have to choose between caring for themselves and their loved ones or paying for basic necessities.

These skyrocketing prices are forcing families to take on debt, sacrifice their homes, or sacrifice their health altogether. Imagine having to pick between having a roof over your head or protecting your child's life. Between eating that day or taking a pill that you need to stay alive. For Americans around the country, these situations are an everyday reality.

Think about that. Americans are dying every year while pharmaceutical companies enjoy more and more profits.

Our witnesses today represent the one in four Americans who struggle to afford the drugs that keep them healthy and—in many cases—keep them alive.

Unfortunately, drug companies continue to raise prices, rake in record profits, and lavishly reward their executives and shareholders, all while stifling competition and preventing access to life-saving drugs.

Drug companies make up only a quarter of the health care industry, but they collect more than half of its profits. Some drugs are developed with federal funding, yet the industry ignores its responsibilities to the American taxpayer and reaps massive profits from our investments.

Drug companies use a variety of tactics to increase their profitability. They use loopholes in the patent system and pay-for-delay agreements with competitors to extend monopolies so they can keep increasing their prices. And even when there is supposed to be competition, so-called competitors increase their prices in lockstep, stuffing their pockets while American families are left paying the bill.

To be sure, we all want drug companies to be successful. We want them to innovate. All of us depend on the pharmaceutical industry to develop cutting-edge therapies and breakthrough drugs. But what we cannot abide is profiteering at the expense of patients and the American taxpayers.

That is why the Committee has been investigating the pharmaceutical industry's price increases. This investigation, which began in January, focuses on the 17 highest cost drugs for the Medicare Part D program.

Our investigation has made significant progress, but we plan to do much more.

Let me be very clear: the Committee will take all steps necessary to ensure full compliance with our investigation, including with our requests to drug companies for documents showing why they are increasing prices so dramatically, how they are using the proceeds, and what steps can be taken to reduce prices.

Our investigation will allow the American public to lift the veil on the industry's pricing practices. And we will help inform the policy solutions to bring drug prices down.

This is a problem that everyone, even in this polarized time, can come together to address. I am hopeful this hearing will be another step in that direction.

Contact: Aryele Bradford, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181.