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House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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Opening Statement Chairman Elijah E. Cummings

Hearing on “Examining the Actions of Drug Companies in Raising Prescription Drug Prices”

January 29, 2019

Today we will examine the actions of drug companies in raising prescription drug prices in the United States, as well as the effects of these actions on federal and state budgets and on American families.

Before we begin, I acknowledge that there is a lot going on right now—here on Capitol Hill and across the country. Until last Friday, the federal government was in the middle of the longest shutdown in U.S. history. Hundreds of immigrant children—and possibly many more—are still separated from their families. And the latest of President Trump’s longtime advisors has been indicted on criminal charges.

But today, for our first hearing, I wanted to focus on one of the biggest problems facing American families across the country—the actions of drug companies that have been aggressively increasing prices on existing drugs and setting higher launch prices for new drugs, all while recording windfall profits.

Two weeks ago, the Committee launched an investigation into prescription drug prices to determine why drug companies are increasing prices so dramatically, how drug companies are using the proceeds, and what steps can be taken to reduce prescription drug prices.

Our first witness today is not President Trump’s personal lawyer, Michael Cohen. It’s not someone from the White House or even someone from the Trump Administration. Contrary to what some have claimed, that was never what we planned.

The first witness to testify before the Oversight Committee is Antoinette Worsham. Ms. Worsham is a working mother whose daughter died tragically when she could not afford to pay for the insulin she needed to treat her diabetes and instead began to ration her medicine.

Ms. Worsham, it’s not easy to testify before Congress, and you are very courageous. I want to thank you for being here to share your family’s story with us. You are not alone.

Researchers at Yale University recently found that one in four patients with Type 1 or Type 2 Diabetes “have reported using less insulin than prescribed.”

So, when you testify here today, you are representing thousands and thousands of your fellow Americans who are suffering from the same worsening problem.

I also want to thank our other witnesses for being here today. We are grateful to have Dr. Catherine Georges of AARP to speak on behalf of America’s seniors. We also value the expert testimony of Dr. Jerry Anderson, Dr. Aaron Kesselheim, and Dr. Avik Roy.

I have been waiting a very long time to hold this hearing. For the past decade, I have been trying to investigate the actions of drug companies for all sorts of drugs—old and new, generic and brand-name. We have seen time after time that drug companies make money hand over fist by raising the prices of their drugs—often without justification, and sometimes overnight—while patients are left holding the bill.

The pharmaceutical industry is one of the most profitable in the world—and one of the most powerful. Fourteen drug companies each made more than \$1 billion in profits just in the third quarter of 2018. And they have the best lobbyists money can buy. Let me be clear: there are powerful interests here that do not want us to interfere with their massive profits.

But there is a strong bipartisan consensus that we must do something to rein in out-of-control price increases. Even President Trump has said that drug companies are “getting away with murder.” But tweets are not enough—we need real action and meaningful reforms.

We all recognize that research and development efforts on groundbreaking medications have made immeasurable contributions to the health of Americans, including new treatments and cures for diseases that have affected people for centuries.

But the bottom line is that the ongoing escalation of prices by drug companies is simply unsustainable.

This is a matter of life and death, and we have a duty to act now. Our constituents are demanding it. And I am grateful that we are finally starting down that road with today’s hearing.

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