

Statement for the Record, Ranking Member Richard Burr

Primary Health and Retirement Security Subcommittee Hearing: “Why Does the U.S. Pay the Highest Prices in the World for Prescription Drugs?”

March 23, 2021

The hearing today is focused on the cost of medications in the United States, comparing the price of these drugs to the prices available in other countries around the world. The drug pricing debate has been underway in the Senate for many years, with numerous bipartisan proposals put forward during the 116th Congress. But, I would like to remind my colleagues that the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered these debates, showing us in Congress, Americans, and those around the globe the undertaking associated with biomedical research, and the importance of fostering an environment that rewards and stimulates innovation so we can bring treatments, therapies, and vaccines to market in as timely a manner as possible.

I agree with my colleagues that the cost of medications is an issue that deeply affects Americans, and our payment models in public and private health care programs must keep pace with the new products that come to market. The new ways in which we are able to address devastating diagnoses that, at one time, had no options for care are only as good as the ability for Americans to access them. Prior to the pandemic, Senator Crapo and I introduced legislation to improve this

access, while maintaining the incentive to innovate, and encourage and foster American innovation.

The novel coronavirus pushed the American biomedical research enterprise to the brink of what few thought would be possible – three authorized vaccines in ten months. Not only were these vaccines brought through large-scale phase 3 trials, but they were made available to the American people immediately upon their authorization by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This availability was made possible through the foundational laws that streamlined the process for making these life-saving drugs available to the American people.

Many of these foundational laws were the result of the work in the HELP Committee. The 21st Century Cures Act recognized the critical importance of ensuring that the United States remained the global leader in biomedical research, and made the investments and policy changes necessary to maintain this leadership role. This hearing comes at a moment when every American stands to benefit from the efforts of the biomedical research community. We have three authorized vaccines to combat COVID-19, multiple medicines to reduce hospitalizations and deaths, and hundreds of tests to detect the virus.

As we examine our policies and programs that affect the costs of medications in the United States, we must balance the changes that we propose against the affects that they will have on the ability for our developers to innovate.

America's ability to respond to the everyday health care challenges we face, as well as the next public health threat in the future will be impacted by this balance. If we do not get it right, we will not have the countermeasures, medicines, and technologies we have today to save as many lives as possible, and that cost, would be too high.