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House of Representatives

The House met at noon and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. RASKIN).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
May 14, 2019.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JAMIE RASKIN to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 3, 2019, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties. All time shall be equally allocated between the parties, and in no event shall debate continue beyond 1:50 p.m. Each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, shall be limited to 5 minutes.

VOTE TO LOWER PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. COURTNEY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, about 6 months ago, this country went through a historic election that shattered records that go back almost 100 years. It was the largest voter turnout for a midterm election since 1914. It elected a new majority in the House of Representatives by over 10 million votes.

If you drill down below those top lines, what you will see is that the biggest driving issue for American voters, who turned up in record numbers last November, was, in fact, the issue of healthcare.

If you drill down even further, what you will find is that the cost of prescription drugs was the biggest concern that people had about the security and stability of their healthcare. And why not?

Recent polling by Kaiser showed that 79 percent of Americans feel that prescription drug prices are unreasonable. Eighty percent believe that pharmaceutical company profits are to blame. One-third of Americans said they haven't taken their medications as prescribed because they have trouble affording it.

Again, the stories, in terms of the disparity of pricing in the U.S. versus other parts of the civilized, developed world, are just rampant. Obviously, we pay the highest prices here in this country, and the next highest country, Switzerland, pays 25 percent less than U.S. patients do for comparable medications.

This week, the new majority in the House of Representatives is going to be taking up H.R. 987, the Strengthening Health Care and Lowering Prescription Drug Costs Act, which we will be voting on either Thursday or Friday. This bill, which listened to patients all across the country and stakeholders who have been trying to endure these ridiculous costs, will do a number of things.

Number one, it will end pay-for-delay, which will prohibit brand-drug manufacturers from paying off generic companies that produce a competing generic drug. In other words, they are maintaining their exclusivity by paying off generic manufacturers, which are designed to create a stronger marketplace and lower prices for American patients.

It also ends the practice of parking by generic drug companies. Again, once you apply to the FDA for a generic drug, you can get 180 days where you exclude anyone else, any other generic manufacturer, from competing with a similar medication.

The FDA has estimated that these practices cost American patients \$3.5 billion in higher drug costs every year.

We will be voting this week, finally, to stand up to special interests, to listen to what experts and people who are close to this market are telling us about ways of trying to widen the marketplace to create more competition, and to, ultimately, lower the drug costs for American patients that are killing State Medicaid budgets and are also killing employer-based health plans. If you listen to what they are saying, that is where the cost driving is the most acute.

This past week, in the State of Connecticut, Attorney General William Tong announced a new lawsuit against generic manufacturers, which was profiled on "60 Minutes" last Sunday night.

Mr. Tong demonstrated how they have smoking-gun evidence of price-fixing amongst different drug companies. Forty-four States are joining Connecticut in that effort.

It is time, whether it is the legislative branch of Congress or whether it is a different branch, in the court systems, that we start holding drug companies accountable.

The vote that is going to take place this week keeps faith with that historic turnout last fall to make sure that we are going to get real action to address the issue of healthcare.

RELIEF FOR BLUE WATER NAVY VIETNAM
VETERANS

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, we are also voting this week on H.R. 299—it will be this evening—the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, which will finally eliminate a 17-year barrier

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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