

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on Efforts To Reduce Prescription Drug Costs in Concord, New Hampshire

October 22, 2024

The President. Thank you, everyone. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

What's your name?

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. Oh, is that right?

Audience member. [Inaudible]—for us.

The President. All right. Well, thanks for being here.

Have a seat, everyone.

Audience member. Thank you, Joe!

The President. [Laughter] Well, thank you.

Look, Lauren, thanks for that introduction and for sharing your story. Unfortunately, there are too many stories like yours all across America. Sadly, it's a familiar one to many Americans.

People lay in bed at night, literally, staring at the ceiling, wondering what would happen if their spouse became seriously ill or got cancer, if their child gets sick, or if something happens to you. Do you have enough insurance? Can you afford the medical bills? Will you have to sell the house? Will you have to get a mortgage? "How in God's name are we going to pay for those prescriptions? Prescription drugs are so damn high."

And you find out a big reason why you're lying awake at night and asking those questions is because Big Pharma is charging you exorbitant prices for the prescriptions you may badly need—literally, higher prices than anywhere in the world—and that's not hyperbole; it's a fact—anywhere in the world.

I've been fighting, like others, Big Pharma since I was a United States Senator, back in the days when we were told they couldn't be touched. They had an exemption basically. Unlike other parts of the health care system, Big Pharma got a special cutout—carve-out that prevented Medicare from negotiating prescription drug prices with them. They weren't allowed to do that.

For years, advocates, like many of you here today, have worked tirelessly to change that and to give Medicare the power to lower prescription drug prices, just like the Department of Veterans Affairs was able to do for veterans. Same power. And it matters. It matters a lot.

That's why one of the proudest things I've ever done was pass the Inflation Reduction Act that allowed us to negotiate lower prices for prescription drugs. Not a single Republican voted for this. Not one single Republican in the House or Senate voted—not one.

But thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, we finally beat Big Pharma—in no small part because of your delegation. Not a joke.

Because of partners like Senator Jeanne Shaheen. And I tell you what, she's got a special secret weapon: Billy. [Laughter] You want to be in a foxhole, man, you want Billy in that foxhole with you, man. And Maggie Hassan; Representative Annie—Annie Kuster; and especially Senator Bernie Sanders from Vermont.

That's why we're here today, to talk about a law that Democrats passed and is lowering prescription drug prices and, I might add—and I'll explain in a moment—saving the taxpayers billions of dollars. Not just the individual recipients of the—the benefit, the taxpayers.

Americans pay more for prescription drugs, as has been pointed out by Bernie, than any other advanced nation in the world. I can take you to the airport and put you on Air Force One with me and take you to any pharmacy from Toronto——

Audience member. I'm in!

The President. You're—all right, man. *[Laughter]* All right.

I can take you to Toronto, Canada; Paris, France; Rome, Italy—I can take you anywhere in the world, literally, and you'll pay half or less than you'd pay in America for the exact same drug made by the exact same pharmaceutical company. Same drug. Same pharmaceutical company.

But not anymore. With the help of Democrats in Congress—and Kamala, by the way, cast the tiebreaking vote to make sure it passed. *[Applause]* Don't—don't tell me one vote doesn't count.

He told us it would—I told them what I—when I wrote this bill that I couldn't get it passed. We had a one-vote majority, and I mean—that it wouldn't—never happen, but we stuck together. We finally got it done, and it was a hell of a fight.

The pharmaceutical company—as Bernie referenced, in another way—spent nearly \$400 million—\$400 million to defeat this single bill—\$400 million—but we beat the special interests, and we delivered for the American people.

Because of this law, not only could Medicare finally negotiate lower prices, but it also capped prescription drug costs for seniors total—this year at \$3,500 in 2024 and next—in the next 6 months—and by the way, in the first 6 months of this alone—year alone, on out-of-pocket spending, we saved the people enrolled in Medicare nearly \$1 billion in 6 months—\$1 billion less out of your pocket, nationwide, in just the first 6 months.

That means, as of June, 1.5 million Americans who are enrolled in Medicare hit the cap and do not have to pay a dime more for drugs for the rest of the year, no matter what their costs are.

And here—*[applause]*—but this bill is so extensive, people don't fully understand it.

And guess what? Starting this January—this January—the total cap on prescription drug costs for seniors on Medicare will be even lower. It will go down to \$2,000. They don't have to pay more than \$2,000, no matter what the cost of their drugs are—no matter what.

For example, as some of you unfortunately know, some of the cancer drugs can cost \$10-, \$12-, \$15,000 a year. That's not hyperbole. That's a fact. This change is expected to save 19 million seniors and other people on Medicare—save them—just those ones on Medicare—\$7.4 billion in out-of-pocket spending starting in January.

But here's the deal. It's also going to save the American taxpayers billions of dollars. I'll go into this in a little more detail, but the fact—the bill we passed—the extent of it is—guess what?—the American taxpayer is going to save \$160 billion lowering the deficit—*[applause]*—\$160 billion dollars. Because they no longer have—and Medicare—have to pay \$400 instead of \$35 for insulin, for example.

But that's not all. Thanks to the law I signed for—seniors are already saving on their prescription drug costs now. For example, take insulin to treat diabetes. One in ten Americans—one in ten Americans—has diabetes. I'm not going to ask you if you—if you're the one, but I'll

bet—how many of you know someone who needs to take insulin for their diabetes? Raise your hand. So a good—you know how much it costs to make that insulin? Ten dollars, t-e-n.

And you know the guy who invented it, who discovered the prescription to do it, he made sure that he didn't patent it, because he wanted it available for everyone—for everyone. That's what he did. That's what he did for everyone.

But guess what? Now they charge as much as \$400 a month.

Three years ago, I was down in Northern Virginia and doing a town hall. And I met a 13-year-old boy named Joshua. He and his dad both have type 1 diabetes, which means they needed insulin every day. I spoke with Joshua's mom. Imagine what it's like to look at your child—and I mean this sincerely. Think of this in personal terms. Imagine what it's like to look at your child who needs insulin and you're looking and know you have no idea—no idea—how you're going to pay for it. Not a joke.

One woman in that meeting said: "I have two children that need it. I have to cut their prescription in half. And sometimes I have to choose which one gets the—who gets the insulin."

What does that do to a parent's dignity, their sense of self-worth, your ability to look your child in the eye—and I mean this from the bottom of my heart—look your child in the eye and say: "Honey, I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Or imagine the senior having to cut your pills in half, to skip doses, or forego your prescriptions altogether because you just can't afford it.

Folks, this is the United States of America. So, when we had—when we got elected, we were told we'd never get anything done. We have a one-vote majority and had—anyway, we'd never get anything big done. We got a hell of a lot big done. No—[*applause*]—because of this group right here.

And thanks to one of those laws—[*applause*]. Thanks to one of those laws, the Inflation Reduction Act, seniors with diabetes, as you've heard, now pay—and many of you know—\$35 a month instead of \$400 a month. Thirty—that changes someone's life.

Growing up with the family I grew up in, my dad used to have an expression. He'd say, "Joey, family is the"—I mean this sincerely, my word as a Biden—"family is the beginning, the middle, and the end. And everyone—everyone is entitled to be treated with dignity."

What's it do to a parent? What's it do to a parent when you can't provide something you know your child and your spouse badly needs and there's no way you can pay for it?

But Kamala and I wanted \$35 insulin for everyone—not just seniors, for everybody. And she's going to get it done.

Look, folks, they're still going to make a profit. They're still making 350-percent profit. Costs them 10 bucks to make it. Think about that.

We're taking on the cost of more than just insulin. Medicare, in the same bill, which people are only beginning to find out—understandably, because this bill is a bill that's passed, but it goes on for years. Medicare is now able to negotiate lower prices for some of the costliest drugs that treat everything from heart disease to arthritis to cancer. And here's what the law has already—we've already passed has done.

For the first time ever, every year from this point on—every year, calendar year—Medicare will negotiate the cost of additional prescription drugs.

Earlier this year, I announced that Medicare reached an agreement with drug manufacturers on 10 new drugs that Medicare picked and said, "We're going to negotiate." The most common,

most expensive drugs that treat everything from kidney disease to arthritis to blood cancer and more. These new low prices for all 10 drugs will go into effect in January 2026 and cut the prices on the—those 10 drugs by between 40 and 80 percent.

Next year—the next year, Medicare will negotiate another price—lower price for 15 additional drugs and every year that—thereafter until we get after 20—and 20 drugs, until every drug is covered that's on the market—every one.

It's already passed. And, folks, it isn't just saving seniors money. As I said, it's also saving taxpayers billions of dollars because Medicare will no longer have to pay exorbitant prices to Pharma.

Over the next 10 years—just so far—the newer, lower drug prices and other reforms, we've cut the Federal deficit by \$160 billion, while he raised it by \$200 billion. I'm serious. Think about it.

Look, I'm a capitalist. I was listed for 36 years as the poorest man in Congress, but I'm still a capitalist. *[Laughter]* You think I'm kidding. I got a phone call; I was campaigning for a colleague who was—no longer around, but was up in this neck of the woods, in Vermont—not Bernie, but his predecessor. And I got a phone call from my wife. She said, "Joe"—well, actually, I called home. When I'm away, I'd call, see how the kids are doing before she goes off to teach.

I said, "Hey, Jill, how are you?" "Fine." *[Laughter]* You know you're in trouble when you get that answer. *[Laughter]* This is—I give you my word as a Biden—this is a true story. She said, "Did you read today's paper?" I said, "Honey, they don't have the Wilmington News Journal up here." *[Laughter]* She said, "Well, headline: 'Biden, Poorest Man in Congress.' Is that true?" *[Laughter]* I said, "I don't know," but I guess I was for 36 years. *[Laughter]* I never thought—I didn't have any money, but I had a good salary.

Look, but I'm a capitalist. *[Laughter]* And without competition, it's not capitalism; it's exploitation. When Big Pharma doesn't play by the rules, competitors can't offer lower priced drugs and devices that carry those drugs, so prices stay artificially high.

And look—but we're taking action. For example, we've called out drug companies, as Bernie mentioned, that make inhalers so the people with asthma, they—and some severe asthma—I have asthma, but it's not severe—that they need to breathe—for charging Americans—and he was right; this was not an exaggeration—70 times more than companies in charge—in Europe charge for the same exact prescription. It's outrageous. I think it borders on immoral.

As a result, three of the largest companies, as I skillfully and very privately and peacefully called their CEOs to tell them—*[laughter]*—who make these inhalers are saying that instead of charging up to \$600 out of pocket for—to cap the cost at \$35. And so it's about time.

But, again, Bernie is a big reason why this is happening. You don't want to screw around with Bernie. *[Laughter]*

But we have to do more. Bernie and I said this summer, it's time for drug manufacturers to lower the prices on anti-obesity medications that you hear so much about these days. And by the way, it's not just cosmetically. It saves people's lives, these obesity medicines. It saves their lives because of—they're so overweight and there's so much problems associated with it.

You just heard from Bernie about what these drug companies are doing. The prices of these anti-obesity drugs can be six times higher in America than in other countries, from Canada to Sweden. This is—where I come from, it's called price gouging and corporate greed.

And I know a little about corporations. There are more corporations incorporated in Delaware than every other State in the Union combined. So I'm used to dealing with corporations.

Americans don't like to be played for suckers. We don't like that. I'm—and we're tired of it. And it's outrageous. It's got to stop.

Look, today's announcement follows actions we've already taken to reduce the health care costs for average Americans. Because of Bernie's leadership, we took action to reduce the cost of hearing aids for 1 million Americans by as much as \$3,000. You see them advertise on television. You go for the prescription drug hearing aid, it's \$3,060 or some—whatever the number—over 3,000 bucks. And you get the same hearing aid, and you get it for \$3,000 less because you don't have to go for the prescription; you can go right to the drug—you can go to the drug store for the—right to the counter.

In addition, my administration is banning junk health insurance. These guys are getting—they've been—coming and going. There are plans for health insurance that will look affordable, but then stick consumers with big, unexpected charges.

You know, we ended the—those unfair surprise medical bills. When I was—years ago, when I was in the Senate, and I was a—I had—I had two cranial aneurysms, and I was hospitalized for a long time. And you have what they call surprise medical bills. If the insurance you have doesn't cover a particular provider and not in-network, they charge you significantly more. And so you get these surprise hospital bills.

So hospitals that are in-network can't send you a bill for out-of-network doctors who—you didn't choose and are not part of your—you didn't—you never consulted them. That's banned. I did that by Executive order.

Kamala and I are also protecting and expanding the Affordable Care Act. Today, there are 21 million Americans—21 million Americans—covered by the Affordable Care Act marketplace. That's 9 million more people, individuals, since I've been in office that are now covered by the Affordable Care Act.

More Americans—[*applause*]. More Americans have health care today than ever in American history—today—than ever. And it's in part because I expanded tax credits that save an average of \$800 per person per year, reducing health care premiums for millions of working families who have coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

These enhancements expire next year though. And I'm calling on Congress to make the expanded health care tax credits permanent.

And Trump—Trump and his MAGA Republican friends want to cut the Affordable Care Act out completely. You know how many times they've tried to introduce—they've introduced bills over the last 3 years to do that? Fifty-one times. Fifty-one times. He wants to replace the Affordable Care Act. We can't let that happen.

Look, he calls—he wants to replace it with his—I love his—I love this guy. [*Laughter*] I'm trying to be a very good fella. [*Laughter*] I'm not letting my Irish get the best of me. [*Laughter*]

But my predecessor, the distinguished former President—[*laughter*—he wants to replace the Affordable Care Act with—he calls—this is what he refers to it: a "concept of a plan." [*Laughter*] I've heard that concept of a plan now for almost 8 years. "A concept of a plan." What the hell is a concept of a—he has no concept of anything. [*Applause*] No plan.

If we don't elect Kamala and he gets elected, Trump could kick up to 45 million people off their health insurance—45 million. Over 100 million people could lose health care coverage because they have a preexisting condition. The only reason they could get it is because of the Affordable Care Act.

Trump and MAGA Republicans want to eliminate the Inflation Reduction Act, which they're talking—the "big bill"—which made all these savings possible, raising prescription drug prices again for millions of Americans. They're—state it. They're not—and he—this guy means what he says—means what he says.

Look, during the last administration, my predecessor exploded the national debt more than any previous President in a single term. This guy raised the national debt by \$2 trillion because of a tax cut that overwhelmingly benefited the very wealthy and the biggest corporations.

Now, he's saying, if elected—remember what he said now. If elected, he wants another \$5 trillion tax cut for the very wealthy. For—that's the tax cut he wants.

He won't just get rid of the Department of Education, which he wants to do, and the Affordable Care Act. He'll gut Social Security and Medicare, which he says he wants to do, hurt hard-working people.

I've got a better idea. Let's protect Social Security and Medicare and finally start making the very wealthy pay their fair share to keep these programs—[inaudible]. I mean it.

By the way, you know what the average tax rate is for a billionaire in America? There are a thousand billionaires since COVID. Eight-point-two percent. Anybody who wants to change places with a billionaire's tax rate, raise your hand. [Laughter] I'm serious. Not a joke. Eight-point-two percent.

I proposed raising it to 25 percent, which isn't even close to the highest rate. You know how much that would raise? Five hundred billion dollars over the next 5 years—just paying 25 percent.

Look, let me repeat what I have said since day one and that Kamala has continued to—she's be—continued to commit to. We made a commitment that no one—no one—in America earning less than \$400,000 a year, which is really high, will pay a single additional penny in Federal taxes. Not a single penny—\$400 million—\$400,000. They haven't, and they won't. If Kamala is President, they will continue not to.

So the—I don't want to hear this stuff about "Biden going after the rich." I did that to make sure we understand what the superrich are paying.

And, folks, let me close with this. Bernie and I are going to—have been doing this work for a long time. I know we both look like we're 40, but we're a little older—[laughter]—at least I am. I can't even say it anymore. Anyway. [Laughter]

But we know we've made historic progress in the last 3 years: 35 bucks for insulin, 35 bucks for inhalers, \$2,000-a-year cap, and things continue to go.

We're showing how health care should be a right, not a privilege in America. That's why I've never been more optimistic about our future, and I mean it.

We're at one of those inflection points, folks. The decisions we make in the next election are going to determine what this country looks like for the next four or five decades. And that's not hyperbole. That's a fact.

And, folks, I'm taking too much of your time, but let me say it this way. We just have to remember who in the hell we are. We're the United States of America. We're the United States. There's nothing beyond our capacity—not a damn thing's beyond our capacity.

We're the only nation in history of the world that's come out of every crisis stronger than we went in—every one. Because when we act together, there's nothing beyond our capacity.

The rest of the world is looking to us. We have the strongest economy in the world, and now we've just got to make sure it's available to every single American.

So I leave you by saying I can't tell you how much I appreciate what you're about to do in this election. *[Laughter]* As I—a friend of mine would say, from my lips to God's ears on that one. But look, you've got great candidates. You've got great candidates. And I really mean, we've got to get back to the days where we actually can talk to the other team.

This is not your father's Republican Party.

Audience member. No.

The President. No, no. I mean it—I mean it's not even close.

I came up in an era—I got elected when I was 29 years old to the United States Senate. I had to wait 17 days to be able to be sworn in. I got there as a young civil rights guy in the—when Strom Thurmond and all those guys were still there. But at least—*[inaudible]*—be—honest to God—you could talk to him. And people change.

After all those years serving with Strom Thurmond, on his deathbed, he—hundred years old, his wife called me from Walter Reed Hospital. She said, "Joe?" I said, "Yes, Nancy." And she—she said: "Strom asked me to come out. I'm at the nurse's station with Doctor"—she named his doctor. "He asked me if you'd do him a favor." And I said, "Sure." He said, "Will you do his eulogy?"

I did Strom Thurmond's eulogy. I didn't lie. I started off, and I said, "Grandpa Finnegan, please forgive me for what I'm about to do." *[Laughter]*

But, all kidding aside, even by the time he left, he had the most racially diverse staff in America. He voted for a lot—he voted for the change in all the laws that he had voted for before. There was headline in 1946 of Thurmond—"Thurmond: Hope of the South"—because he was against separate, but equal. Not the proposition you couldn't separate the races, but the proposition that if you had separate, but—you had to spend the exact amount of money in a Black school as a White school.

My generic point is, people change. But these guys just keep getting worse. *[Laughter]* No, I really mean it. They mean what they say. They mean what they say.

I'll conclude by saying that, you know, I—I'll just say something that's both revealing and self-defeating. You know, there is—are only a few advantages of being the oldest guy around. That is, I have more experience in foreign policy than anybody ever that had this job in American history.

I've known every major world leader personally in the last 40 years. Every international meeting I attend, including just being in Germany, as we're walking out—whether at the G-20 or the G-7, whatever it is—they'll pull me aside, one leader after another, quietly, and say: "Joe, he can't win. My democracy is at stake. My democracy is at stake."

If America walks away, who leads the world? Who? Name me a country. And we're doing it without expending American blood by having Americans at war.

So, folks, there's so much at stake. So, please—I know you'll all vote, but please call your neighbors, get your friends, get your relatives, get them to vote, because this is—the Nation's democracy, in my view, depends on it.

God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. Thank you.

Thank you.

[At this point, Senator Bernard Sanders joined the President on stage.]

Oh, there you are. *[Laughter]* We've been doing this a long time, pal.

Sen. Sanders. I know. *[Laughter]*

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:14 p.m. at NHTI Community College. In his remarks, he referred to Concord, NH, resident Lauren Savage; William H. Shaheen, husband of Sen. C. Jeanne Shaheen; Vice President Kamala D. Harris, in her capacity as the 2024 Democratic Presidential nominee; Midlothian, VA, resident Joshua Davis, and his parents Brian and Shannon Davis; and former President Donald J. Trump, in his capacity as the 2024 Republican Presidential nominee. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 23.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts in Concord, NH.

Locations: Concord, NH.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Davis, Brian; Davis, Joshua; Davis, Shannon; Harris, Kamala D.; Hassan, Margaret Wood; Kuster, Ann McLane; Sanders, Bernard; Savage, Lauren; Shaheen, C. Jeanne; Shaheen, William H.; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: Cancer research, prevention, and treatment; COVID–19 pandemic; Federal deficit and debt; Health care costs and affordability; Health insurance exchanges; Hearing aids, affordability and costs; Insulin cost controls; Medical billing, transparency improvement efforts; Medicare and Medicaid programs; New Hampshire, President's visit; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts; Social Security program; Tax Code reform; Vice President.

DCPD Number: DCPD202400939.