

In my experience, that security really works. I grew up in a small family business. My dad started his own business. When he had five employees and my mom was the bookkeeper, he said they were going to set up a retirement plan. It was called a profit-sharing plan at the time. It was before a 401(k). They had no profit the first few years, so it was a little awkward, but when they finally started making money, everybody had a stake. Everybody got a little bit in their retirement nest eggs. When 401(k)s came in, they immediately started a 401(k) plan as well.

I meet people today whom I have known my entire life who turned a wrench their whole careers as a lift truck technician—a lift truck mechanic—who have a retirement savings plan now because of that. They have a nice nest egg of about \$500,000 to \$600,000 that they were able to accumulate. So I know this works. I know small businesses have the opportunity to do more for their workers if we help them more here in Washington. I am committed to trying to get this done.

Another important part of the SECURE Act has to do with older Americans. It says we should raise the age limit that forces older American workers to start depleting and paying taxes on their retirement savings. Currently, at 70½ years old, you have to start taking money out of your retirement plan. You have to do that whether you are working or not. Many people at that age are still working. My dad was still working at 70½. It drove him crazy that he had to take money out while he was still working. He wanted to keep building it up. So in this legislation, we say let's expand that to age 72.

Then, as important, the bill actually lifts the current prohibition on IRA contributions by people over 70½. That means people can make the choice if they want to keep investing in their retirement for as long as they see fit. Remember, somebody who makes it to 70½ is likely to live into his or her nineties. So there is still a lot of time in retirement where you need to have that funding. That kind of flexibility is how we allow people to manage their own retirement savings that makes sense.

The SECURE Act is good for small businesses and good for older Americans, but the reforms don't end there. It has a number of other good provisions. In fact, one is particularly urgent. It reforms the pension nondiscrimination laws I authored alongside my friend Senator BEN CARDIN. Our legislation is very simple. It says we have a glitch right now in current law. We introduced it as separate legislation earlier this year, but it has now been made part of the SECURE Act. It is a critical piece of legislation to pass because if it doesn't pass—and pass soon, like by the end of this year—400,000-plus Americans are going to have their benefits frozen in their defined benefit plans. It will affect 400,000 people through no fault of their own.

In recent years, many companies have transitioned from the traditional defined benefit plans—think of that as a pension plan—to a defined contribution plan like a 401(k). Some of them have elected to grandfather existing employees by closing down their traditional DB plans but allowing those who are there to continue to have the benefits. Unfortunately, what happened is, as they build up seniority, one of the rules in our current testing under 401(k) and profit-sharing plans and defined benefit plans has come into effect. Inadvertently, it has resulted in these plans not being able to continue to approve benefits. It wasn't meant to work that way, but it has for a lot of these people who are in these plans. As a result, again, 400,000 autoworkers are at risk of losing their benefits through no fault of their own. Tens of thousands of other workers have already been affected by these flawed rules.

We have to fix this. We tried to pass this by unanimous consent this fall. This provision has no objection on the Republican side or the Democratic side. Yet we were not able to get it done because some would like to make it remain as part of the SECURE Act and be sure the SECURE Act gets passed. The way to do this is let's pass the whole thing. The SECURE Act makes sense. This particular provision is urgent. Let's not wait. Do it now to help those 400,000 Americans representing States all over the United States who are represented in this Chamber.

Let's pass the SECURE Act. It is a bill that does a lot to put us on the right path. Does it do everything? No.

Senator CARDIN and I introduced a comprehensive bill called the Retirement Security and Savings Act. We go further in a lot of these regards than we talked about today. That is a bill that requires more hearings and a markup and more consideration.

In the meantime, let's do what we can. Let's provide more certainty, more flexibility, and more retirement savings. I am hopeful we can pass this broader legislation I have with Senator CARDIN soon. In the meantime, let's take advantage of the chance right here in front of us. Let's be sure we boost the retirement security to the American people through the SECURE Act. I hope my colleagues will all join me in this, and we can pass this legislation as the House did—on a strong bipartisan basis—and get it to the President for his signature.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

(The remarks of Mr. MERKLEY pertaining to the introduction of S. 2817 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BRAUN). The Senator from Iowa.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, one of my top priorities has been to reauthorize

and modernize the Violence Against Women Act. A survivor myself, I recognize that VAWA provides the right resources to tackle head-on domestic violence and sexual abuse in our communities in Iowa and throughout the United States.

My good friend and colleague DIANNE FEINSTEIN, ranking member on the Judiciary Committee, agreed to work with me on this important topic. For months, Senator FEINSTEIN and I and our staffs have worked closely and in good faith with one another with this shared goal in mind. We have met numerous times, held discussions, and negotiated in a way that has produced real progress.

But just this week, after months of work and mountains of effort toward a bipartisan bill, it all came to a screeching halt. Once again, the Democrats are putting politics ahead of people and have decided to move forward on the House-passed VAWA bill. The House bill is a nonstarter and is chock-full of partisan political talking points that take us further away from rather than closer to a bill we can get over the finish line.

I am all too aware of how this town works. Election-year politics are in full swing, and the grim reality is Democrats cannot afford to be seen giving Republicans a win. The far-left agenda of the House has hijacked the process. It sounds petty and it sounds unbelievable, but, folks, that is the reality.

You would think that supporting survivors and preventing abuse would be placed ahead of petty politics.

I want to be clear. I remain hopeful that we can continue to work in a bipartisan way to get this law reauthorized.

Soon, I plan to respond with a good-faith proposal of my own. This bill will support survivors and hold abusers accountable. It is also a bill that I believe can pass the Senate and get the President's signature.

I invite my colleagues across the aisle to join me in this very, very important effort.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss an issue that I hear from families all across Michigan, the rising cost of prescription drugs. Recently, I held roundtables in several communities across Michigan to hear directly from families, local health providers, and medical professionals about the increasing cost of prescription drugs. I want to share a few of those stories.

I heard from Diane in Grand Rapids, whose son, Jared, suffered a severe asthma attack that tragically resulted in his death. He was just 25 years old. Diane said her son had insurance, but it was not enough and he tried stretching out usage of his asthma medication to deal with ever-rising costs. Diane shared just how unimaginable her pain was to lose her child to a condition

that should have been manageable, with affordable life-sustaining medications.

I heard from Rachael from Greenville who has three children with Type 1 diabetes, but insurance denied coverage for her children's insulin, making it simply unaffordable. So Rachael's family drove across the border into Canada where she said they were able to purchase insulin for \$71 per box, compared to about \$600 for the exact same insulin in Michigan. Rachael is rightfully angry that she needed to travel to another country simply to get her children the insulin they need to stay alive.

Sheron from Detroit told me about the financial challenges of treating sarcoidosis, a rare disease, while also fighting triple-negative breast cancer. Sheron said that insurance was going to charge her \$5,000 for medication she could easily take at home, but it would completely cover it only if she went to the hospital. The last thing Sheron wanted to do was trek to the hospital as she coped with the side effects of chemotherapy.

And I heard from Jeanette from Burton, who had a nearly \$500 co-pay for a prescription while undergoing treatment for thyroid cancer, but without the help of a charitable patient group, she could not afford the medication. While working to get assistance, she went without her medication and could have suffered serious complications.

Unfortunately, these are not isolated stories, and these are not isolated individuals. Too many Michiganders are struggling with rising prescription drug costs, and the consequences can be literally life-threatening. Between 2012 and 2018, prices for brand-name drugs in the United States have increased 68 percent, making critical medications out of reach for most families.

The list price in 2017 for a 1-year supply of Humira—the No. 1 selling brand-name drug that treats arthritis, psoriasis, and Crohn's disease—was over \$58,000. That is more than the annual median income for people in the State of Michigan.

The price of insulin has spiked in recent years, growing by 55 percent since 2014. That is simply outrageous, and it is simply unacceptable. Guided by the stories from Michigan families and medical professionals, I am working to examine and tackle the rising cost of prescription drugs.

Earlier this week, through my work as ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, I announced I am conducting an investigation into the skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs. I am also investigating the growing shortages of critical medications affecting hospitals and patients throughout the country.

Unaffordable prescription and hospital-administered drugs—and the increasing number and length of drug shortages—have become an economic,

national security, and public health crisis for Michigan, as well as for the rest of the country.

Through my investigation, I am working to: 1, identify solutions to address increasing drug costs; 2, evaluate the effect of drug shortages on patient care; 3, examine the national security implications of our growing reliance on drugs manufactured overseas, primarily in China and India.

This investigation builds on some of my previous efforts, including my call for the Food and Drug Administration to share information on the Administration's efforts to counter drug shortages—and my bill advancing in the Senate to lower healthcare costs for seniors through Medicare Part B. For many people in Michigan and across the country, being able to afford your medicine is a matter of life and death, and we must take action.

We must allow certainly for safe drug importation from Canada, but let me be clear: Going to Canada is not a solution. You need to be able to purchase affordable, quality, safe prescription drugs in the United States.

We must improve competition, end price gouging, increase price transparency, and hold drug companies accountable.

We must enable Medicare to negotiate drug prices for seniors. We must eliminate drug shortages to ensure that all patients can get the medication they need when they need it, and we must work to bring more affordable generic medications to the market.

Families in Michigan and across the country are counting on us. Families should never be forced to choose between paying their bills or getting the medication they need. But sadly, that is the choice that too many families are facing today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

TRIBUTE TO PERRY GREEN

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, it is Thursday afternoon, and that means it is one of my favorite times in the U.S. Senate because I get to come to the Senate floor and recognize an Alaskan who has done something that is great for our State, great for the community, great for the country—you name it. I come here and brag about somebody I represent in Alaska, and I call this person the Alaskan of the Week. I know the Presiding Officer likes it, and the pages certainly do.

What I like to do when I am starting this speech each week is talk to our visitors in the Gallery and people who are watching on TV to give a little update on what is going on in Alaska and encourage a visit. You will have the visit of a lifetime, guaranteed, if you come to Alaska.

Right now, as you can imagine, the great white north winter is coming in parts of the State. It has definitely arrived in other parts. Winter is a great time to be in Alaska, not just the summer. You can ski, snowboard, and at

the end of the day sit back, drink something warm, and watch the northern lights dance in our sky. So come visit. You will love coming to visit Alaska.

What is really nice to do if you come and visit now is to wear a fur in Alaska. We have some great furriers in Alaska, but David Green Master Furrier in Anchorage is one of the oldest, most well respected, and certainly one of the best in our State and, I think, in the country. It is an Alaskan institution, and our Alaskan of the Week, Mr. PERRY Green, one of the kindest, most generous, most patriotic, hard-working Alaskans, has worked throughout the decades to keep this great institution that way.

Let me tell you a little bit about Perry Green. His father David was from New York. He was enthralled with Alaska, a huge fan of the characters that Alaska attracts, as well as Jack London's "Call of the Wild." So David moved to Washington State to be close to Alaska, where he eventually opened stores many, many years ago.

Perry Green, David's son, was born in Seattle on March 17, 1936. That is St. Patrick's Day. How great is that? I always knew Perry had a little Irish in him. He recalled:

My father would come back from Alaska with such great stories, and all the Alaska sourdoughs would come to visit him. They sat at the dinner table and I was enthralled with their tales.

Anyone who knows anything about Alaska knows those stories, has heard about them, read about them—bear attacks, moose charges, frostbite, crossing perilous rivers, traversing vast landscapes under the dancing skies, wolves howling in the distance, fires barely starting at 40 below, and countless stories about being saved by the kindness of strangers out on the trail.

Perry also came of age during World War II. His father made fur ruffs for the soldiers' parkas, which set the stage for Perry's enduring patriotism and support for our troops. He said:

I remember watching the troops head overseas, the wonderful parades. It all made me swell up with pride.

I would say that Perry Green is the most patriotic American I know, and we have a lot of patriots in Alaska.

He met his beautiful future wife, the beautiful Gloria, gracious Gloria, when they were both young and began dating as teenagers, and they have been together ever since. As a matter of fact, that is 63 years of marriage. That is something to be celebrated. Perry said that marrying Gloria was the best decision he ever made. I know Gloria, and I would certainly agree with Perry, and I would certainly agree with this: Like me, he definitely married up.

Like his father, he traveled back and forth to Washington State often for work. He went to Alaska to work on the Alaska Railroad in order to save enough money to buy Gloria a wedding ring. He served in the U.S. Army for 3 years, and eventually he and Gloria