keeping up. U.S. manufacturing workers are seeing their lowest average earnings—adjusted for inflation—since 2014, while the overall private-sector workforce is seeing wages at 2019 levels.

Unfortunately, these hardships show little sign of slowing anytime soon. Last month's core inflation, when compared to just a few months earlier, is actually accelerating. So we have got the worst inflation since 1981. The vast majority of Americans are saying it has them in a bind financially. And it is low- and middle-income families who are actually bearing the brunt of it.

This, Madam President, is the landscape as Washington Democrats keep trying to force even more party-line liberal bills with even more new Washington spending and—for a bonus—a bonus—massive new tax hikes. For the better part of a year, our colleagues have been trying to cook up legislation that would make life harder for small businesses, attack affordable American energy, and hike income taxes on families in every single tax bracket.

Apparently, for most Washington Democrats, spending the country into inflation actually wasn't enough. Now, for a second act, they want to tax us into a recession. The response for Democrats robbing American families once cannot be for Democrats to rob American families a second time.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

Madam President, now, on a related matter, one of the things Washington Democrats appear most eager to do with their one-party control of government is to resurrect their war on America's world-leading medical innovation sector. In a statement just last week, President Biden praised fellow Democrats for having ''beaten back'' the industry behind most of the world's lifesaving treatments and cures. And as things stand right now, it appears our colleagues intend to work from a familiar leftwing playbook in the coming weeks.

Washington Democrats are working right now—right now—to find ways to put more bureaucracy between American patients and the treatments they rely on. They want to put socialist price controls between American innovators and new cures for debilitating diseases. With one-party Democratic control of government, they just might get away with it. But our colleagues need to think again. Even just the medicine-related parts of their partisan plans would have hugely, hugely negative consequences for our country.

The American people know that government can't magically make things cost less by passing laws saying things should cost less. There is no Washington magic wand—trust me—or else we would have every American driving $1 pickup trucks and eating $1 steaks just by passing a law setting those prices at $1.

There is no such thing as a free lunch. The bill for made-up price controls always comes due. In this case, the invoice will be delivered to the American people who are living with actual health challenges. The price of bigger government will be fewer lifesaving cures and less innovation in the future.

Let's face it, prescription treatments are expensive to produce. Long-term investments in cutting-edge research and development require certainty. What Washington Democrats want to do right now would bleed hundreds of billions of dollars in potential R&D out of American industry, shrinking the pipeline for new therapeutics for patients with chronic conditions, pouring cold water on the next breakthroughs in the fight against Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

Prescription drug socialism would have devastating and compounding effects. By one analysis, price controls like the ones Washington Democrats want to ram through could cost more than 330 million cumulative years of life expectancy. That is enough to shorten every American's life by a full year.

Two years ago, in 2020, America's medical innovators were busy blowing away expectations and responding to a once-in-a-century pandemic with lifesaving therapeutics and vaccines in record time—record time. Two years later, in 2022, Democrats have decided that what those same innovators need—the same innovators need—is heavyhanded Washington micromanagement from the same politicians who couldn't even—listen to this—couldn't even keep baby formula on store shelves.

Our country is contending with historic inflation. Our economy is on the brink of recession. And Washington Democrats want to gamble with the health of the American people? It doesn't get much more reckless than that.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I wonder if Americans think the cost of prescription drugs are too high. I wonder if Americans realize that the cost of prescription drugs are so high in this country that they are driving the cost of health insurance premiums up.

Don't take my word for it. BlueCross BlueShield of Illinois told me that directly. Why are premiums going up? Prescription drug prices are going up.

I wonder if the American people realize there are only two nations on Earth that allow drug companies to advertise drugs on television. You know one of them: United States of America. The other: New Zealand. No other country allows them to take place.

I wonder if the American people realize that the same exact American drugs that are sold here at the highest prices are sold at a deep discount in other countries: Canada. In Canada, the reason American drugs cost less than they do in America is because the Canadian people won't tolerate the prices pharmaceutical companies charge people in this country. So they established standards and cut the prices for the exact same drugs made, manufactured, and sold in the United States. They are not alone. Europe does the same thing, bringing down these prices.

So we decided that at least in one area—one area—we were going to make an exception to this overpricing of prescription drugs: the Veterans' Administration. We said it costs a lot to keep our promise to veterans who have served this country and need medical care afterward. So we are going to allow the Veterans' Administration—we do under law—to negotiate with the drug companies to bring prices down. It works. They are brought down dramatically.

For the longest time, many of us have thought that isn't enough because most of the drugs are being sold outside the Veterans' Administration, and there is no negotiation; it is a take-it-or-leave-it. Medicare—tens of millions of Americans who are covered by Medicare face the cost of drugs which are sky-high.

So we decided, on the Democratic side, that we were going to listen to the people we represent, who have told us over and over again that when it comes to the cost of living and expenses families face, many of these families were facing a choice of their money or their lives to buy drugs that doctors told them were essential for their survival. So we proposed that, finally, the pharmaceutical companies have to negotiate with the government when it comes to Medicare drug pricing.

Now, you didn't hear that directly from the Senator from Kentucky who just spoke. He talked about socialism in pricing drugs. Socialism? For the government to suggest we want to bargain for prices? These companies, incidentally, are not getting by hand to mouth. They are doing quite well, and they are making a lot of money.

And they didn't do it on their own. I want to address that issue, this notion that if they were paid less for their drugs, it would stifle innovation. The pharmaceutical industry typically spends more money on advertising than they do on research.

Why would they do that? So that some people watching the ad of a person skipping through a field of flowers will finally get to the point where they can spell ''Xarelto'' and go into a doctor's office and say: I want to skip through flowers. I want Xarelto. And—you know what—some doctors say ''fine'' and write the script. That is why the cost of medicine and healthcare goes up.

The bottom line is this. These pharmaceutical companies, as good as they are, as many things as they find, they don't do it alone. You know what the No. 1 supplier of research information is to the private sector pharmaceutical companies in America? The Federal Government. The National Institutes

of Health. We spend tens of billions of dollars each year doing basic research, which is then used by the pharmaceutical company to develop their drugs.

Is it too much to ask them to bargain a fair price for drugs sold to Medicare so that the taxpayers get a break, and the pharmaceutical profits may go down just slightly? I don't think it is too much to ask.

We are going to have an interesting debate in the next few weeks because the Democrats think it is time that pharma be held responsible for dramatically overcharging Americans for pharmaceutical drugs that cost a fraction of its price in Canada and Europe.

The Senator from Kentucky obviously sees it another way. He thinks it is socialism. He calls it a free lunch—we want to give away a free lunch. It isn't a free lunch when you can't afford to fill your prescription the doctor gave you and you wonder if you are jeopardizing your health or your life.

Take the drug insulin. We are working on that too. Insulin wasn't discovered by Americans; it was discovered by Canadians back in the early part of the 20th century. And they decided—and what a gesture it was—that they were going to give away and surrender the patent on this discovery.

Before then, it was not atypical that people died from diabetes. After insulin, they could survive. It was a life and death drug. And the researchers who discovered it said: This shouldn't be a profitmaker; this should be something that is priced so that people can continue to live.

Well, what has happened to insulin? Over the years, the pharmaceutical companies started doing their magic, and the cost of insulin for many people is dramatically higher than they can afford. Some people actually cut the amount of insulin which they are told to take because they can't afford it.

We want to bring down the cost of this lifesaving drug to a $35 a month maximum premium for insulin, and I think that is a reasonable amount of money.

So I believe that when it comes to the drug industry in America, it is a great sector of our economy. They have found some wonderful things, with the help of Federal research. They are making profits, as I guess every private sector company is designed to do. But it is not unreasonable for us to ask, it is not socialistic for us to ask, as American citizens, that they negotiate fair prices for all Americans. They do it for veterans. They can do it for Medicare and others.

And if Senator MCCONNELL is signaling we are in for a fight over this issue, all I have to say are three words: Bring it on. Bring it on. The American people are sick and tired of the overpricing of these drugs, and I think it is time that we have this debate. And if the Republicans want to stay on the side of pharma and say the Democrats are wrong, let's take that to the American people in November. I think it is a viable issue.

ABORTION

Madam President, in the weeks since the Alito-Thomas Supreme Court majority erased the constitutional right to abortion, the rightwing disinformation machine has kicked into high gear. Again and again, we hear the same empty words of reassurance from the Republican side. They claim that overturning Roe simply handed the question of abortion back to the people's representatives, back to the States—just that simple.

This is false, and they know it. The reality is overturning Roe has unleashed a healthcare crisis in this country. It has ripped a right to make essential healthcare decisions away from the people and their doctors and handed it to the politicians in individual States.

As soon as Roe was overturned by the Alito Supreme Court, nearly a dozen States outlawed abortion.

In Ohio, abortion access is so restricted that we have heard this horrible, bone-chilling story of a 10-year-old rape victim who was denied care in the State of Ohio. Ten years old, Madam President. At the age of 10, parents and grandparents are still worried about 10-year-old grandkids crossing the street. This 10-year-old victim had been raped. She was pregnant.

The State's law in Ohio only permits abortions before fetal cardiac activity is detected, which is usually at 6 weeks of gestation. At the time this 10-year-old child sought care, she was 6 weeks and 3 days pregnant. She missed the deadline. So the child was forced to flee her home State of Ohio and travel to Indiana, where she was given medical care.

And from the moment this story made headlines, what was the response from Republican politicians and the conservative media? They said it was fake news; that it is a hoax. They accused the doctor who treated the girl of just plain lying. They said that Democrats were making up these doomsday scenarios to scare the American people. The Wall Street Journal—the Wall Street Journal, Madam President—even ran an editorial calling the story ''Too Good to Confirm.''

But unthinkable and sickening as it may be, the story is true. So why did Republicans go to such great lengths to discredit it? Because they refused to admit the truth. When faced with a case that shows the extreme consequences of outlawing abortion, as the Supreme Court just did weeks ago, they dismissed the facts as a lie.

Well, here is the truth. Republican anti-choice policies will force children—children who are still not old enough to cross the street on their own—to give birth. Ten years old. And Republicans are not content with simply banning all abortion. They want to prosecute the healthcare professionals who have to make the life-and-death decisions in the practice of medicine—healthcare professionals like the one who treated this little girl from Ohio.

Just last week, Indiana's Republican attorney general declared he was going to investigate this doctor from Indiana who provided this abortion. Well, what were his grounds for investigating? He claimed that the doctor didn't properly report the abortion to State authorities. But even that isn't true. Records show the doctor followed the law exactly as it is written.

How did we reach this point? It has not even been a month since the Dobbs decision, and Republican officials are already finding ways to intimidate doctors who are providing essential care to Americans and America's children. The radical rightwing majority on the Supreme Court has given these lawmakers a green light to enact the most unreasonable, outrageous abortion bans imaginable.

And as cruel as these bans may be, they cannot change the reality that reproductive healthcare is healthcare. In some cases, an abortion can mean the difference between life and death.

The moment politicians start meddling in life-or-death health decisions, the moment we turn over these life-or-death decisions to a legislator rather than to a doctor and a patient, we are headed down a dark, dangerous, and deadly road.

Here is what is happening. Right now, there is a doctor in America, today, who is being forced to make an impossible decision: Do I risk jail time, do I risk criminal charges by providing the care that I believe my patient needs, or do I sit back and risk my patient's life and health from pregnancy complications?

What a choice. Do you want to make that as an elected official? I am not competent to make that choice. I am a lawyer—liberal arts. I didn't spend a day in medical school. When it comes to the people I care about—my family and others—I want medical professionals to make that decision, not run-of-the-mill politicians.

Last week, the Texas attorney general filed a lawsuit against President Biden's administration. What was the reason? Because the administration issued guidance making it clear that healthcare providers are legally protected when offering legally mandated life- or health-saving services in emergency situations.

Think about that. Texas would rather allow women to risk their health—even death—than allow them to seek emergency lifesaving care.

And, yesterday, the New York Times—and I commend this article to everyone—reported that miscarriage patients in Texas are being turned away by doctors. These women are being denied care because ''doctors . . . worried the patients might have actually taken abortion pills that hadn't expelled the pregnancy, two situations that appear medically identical.''

One San Antonio based ob-gyn put it best when she said: