

for Kansas. We ought to be interested, again, in solar and wind energy. Kansas is the third highest producer of wind energy, wind power, in the United States.

The Biden administration must—I asked them to shift course and promote an “all of the above” strategy that produces more U.S. energy from all sources. It benefits America; it benefits the world; and it especially benefits the consumers who are hurting so much at the grocery store and the gas pump and utility bills.

We need to weaken our reliance on foreign adversaries, and we need to increase the production of energy in the United States.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes and Senator DURBIN for up to 15 minutes prior to the scheduled vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I am happy to come to the floor today to join my colleague the Senator from Alaska, Mr. SULLIVAN, as well as my colleague from Kansas, to talk about where we are with this administration or where, unfortunately, we aren't when it comes to prioritizing American-made energy.

As has been noted here on the floor by my colleagues, the President has just returned from the Middle East. It wasn't for a sightseeing trip; it was really all about oil. He was talking about oil. Above all, the President made that trip to ask the leaders of several foreign nations, members of OPEC, to increase their production levels.

OK, we get it. Gasoline prices are way too high. We know that. We have hit national records in recent weeks. They are averaging right now about \$5.32 a gallon in my State. That is actually down a little bit from where we were last month, but it is up over 50 percent from where we were last year.

As has been said repeatedly, and we don't need to say it here on the floor of the Senate, people are feeling it in their homes. They are feeling it in their pocketbooks. Families are. Businesses are. Whether you are in places like Anchorage or Fairbanks, your budgets are stretched thinner and thinner and thinner.

It is increasingly difficult for small tourist operations, whether you are trying to take people out on sightseeing trips in the air or on the water. Our fishing fleets have to fill up their fishing vessels. But especially, particularly, our outlying villages—these villages that are off the road system—that already faced high prices, now the prices are astronomical.

I met with some leaders from the Northwest Arctic Borough just a few days ago, and they shared with me that

in many of their communities, the communities were paying about \$5.25 on average. But these were prices that were locked in from last fall when the last fuel barge came into those northern waters and was able to make its way up the river systems. Now, with the first spring barge comes literally—literally—in 1 day going from \$5.25 to over \$8 a gallon. That is a lock-in price that they are going to be living with until that next barge.

Think about what that means when you are a community that is locked into these extraordinarily high prices. When that last fuel barge comes, you are going to have small villages that are going to be looking to see how much—not how much do we need to get through the winter but how much can we afford? They don't have much of a tax base. How much can we afford?

My theory is that they are only going to be able to buy as much as they can, and it is not going to be enough to get them through the winter. So halfway through the winter, in the darkest and coldest, when everything is locked in the ice, they are going to run out of fuel. And you have to be able to keep the heat on or everything breaks. So how do you get the fuel? You fly it in. Think about what those costs then become. So for us in Alaska, this is not only frightening, but it has the potential to just be catastrophic as we look at no end in sight for these prices.

I don't begrudge the President for meeting with world leaders. We expect him to do this. And I think it is a great idea to do what we can to increase supply to reduce prices. This is kind of the basics of supply and demand. I have championed this for years. Let's increase our supply. But the question is where that energy is going to come from. Where should we focus our time? Where should we focus our efforts? I think it just has to begin at home. It has to be here.

But apparently this administration has decided they are going to go elsewhere. They are going to seek oil from the Middle East. They are sending envoys to Venezuela. They are pushing for a weakened Iran deal, signaling that oil from the two worst regimes in the world could somehow come back online? This makes zero sense to me. It just makes no sense. Why would we do this? Why would we go abroad when we have the resources here? Why choose oil produced at low environmental standards, like my friend from Kansas just said? You are going to countries that have lower environmental standards and track records when it comes to human rights abuses, and we are just going to turn our eye to it? We are just going to close our eyes and say that is OK now? No, it is not OK.

Why? Why do we give fist bumps to leaders while sucker-punching the producers, the refiners, and the gas station owners in our own domestic industry? Unfortunately, that is what we are seeing. We are seeing that happen in my State. We have billions of barrels of

oil in our Federal areas. We have a world-class pipeline that is one-quarter full and a general refusal from the administration to help us do much of anything about it.

We can talk about the 1002 area, the largest untapped conventional oilfield in North America, is what is projected, but you are not seeing this administration pushing forward with that even though we mandated—even though Congress mandated this in 2017. Not a chance. They are not moving forward with that. They have halted all development—illegally, I might add.

But also take the 5-year plan, the proposed 5-year plan. It is long overdue. Now we are learning that the administration may not hold a single offshore lease through 2028. They are proposing a single sale in Cook Inlet in Alaska after canceling the one that was just supposed to have been held, suggesting that they are OK, they are somehow OK with crimping the only source of natural gas for hundreds of thousands of Alaskans.

Again, this direction just makes no sense to me. We need a course correction from the Biden administration. Even as we are moving forward in so many other initiatives, we need to have a strategic plan that assures that our own energy security—our own energy security—is addressed and also helping to improve the energy security of our allies.

I believe that we can do this without taking our eye off the ball of what we need to do to reduce emissions to address the challenges that face us when it comes to climate. But we have to acknowledge that the world has changed. There is still, though, no substitute or equal for American energy. So what we need is for common sense to prevail over wishful thinking. We need resource development here at home in places like Alaska and Kansas. They need to be our first and our highest priority. The longer it takes for that to happen, the greater the price that Alaskans will be paying and all Americans will be paying.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I was on the floor 2 days ago when the Republican Senate leader came to the floor and said something which I still don't quite understand, and I would like to refer to it in a statement.

CLOTURE MOTION WITHDRAWN

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to withdraw the cloture motion with respect to the Merle nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Not hearing an objection, it is withdrawn.

The cloture motion, on the nomination of Natasha C. Merle, of New York, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of New York, was withdrawn.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that following the confirmation vote on the Williams nomination, the Senate vote on the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 920, the nomination of Bernadette M. Meehan, of New York, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Chile.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, now, back to my statement.

I came to the floor and heard a speech by the Republican leader, MITCH MCCONNELL of Kentucky. Now, it wasn't the first. I have heard many, and I listen closely so that I can divine the strategy of Senate Republicans. And for weeks we have heard speeches about the plight of American families dealing with inflation. It is a real problem. If you go to buy anything these days, you are shocked by the price, starting at the gas pump, if you have aspirations to buy a car or truck, ordinary food items—much more expensive. Most families are not seeing any increase in income so it is a real hardship for them to keep up.

Well, the Senator from Kentucky has given that speech so many times, I could almost repeat it verbatim. And I don't quarrel with his premise. Inflation is painful for working families.

But then—but then—he went into an area of pricing and took an exactly opposite point of view. What he said was he thought, if there was an effort to control the price of prescription drugs, it was “socialist price control,” it was really asking for something for nothing, and he didn't support it.

And I stopped to think for a second. Wait a minute. All the polling, when you ask American families what they worry about, tells you that this is a big headache for families. They go to a doctor. Somebody is sick. The doctor prescribes a drug. They take the prescription to the drug store. They get it filled. And then comes the moment of truth, the moment at the cash register when the family is told: Incidentally, that will cost you \$100, \$200, \$300 over your insurance coverage.

And you know what some families say?

I wish I could afford that; I can't.

And they don't pick up the drug or they pick it up and, instead of taking it, they kind of wait and say: I will see if I get any better by myself. They do the wrong thing because of the cost of prescription drugs.

So when the Republican Senators come to the floor every day talking about family expenses, it comes as a shock to know that they are planning to oppose the Democratic effort to establish prescription drug pricing. They complain about high prices for everything else, but they don't seem to want to do anything when it comes to prescription drugs.

Americans pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs, an average of nearly four times as much paid by an American family for exactly the same drugs that are being sold in Canada and Europe. Where are those drugs made? All made in the same place, all made by the same company, four times the cost for America.

To add insult to injury, many of these prescription drugs only exist because of the successful investment by American taxpayers in the National Institutes of Health. The National Institutes of Health is an amazing research organization. They do the research, the basic research. The drug companies capitalize on it, make the drugs, and sell them at a profit. So taxpayers pay on the front end for the drugs. American taxpayers and tax-paying families pay on the back end for the actual cost of the pharmaceuticals.

Out-of-control prescription costs aren't just hurting people financially; they hurt the health of Americans. One in five Americans don't take the medications as prescribed because they can't afford them. They cut their pills in half or they skip doses because they can't do it; they can't pay it.

“Your money or your life”—you expect to hear that from a stickup artist, not from a pharmaceutical company. That is the choice Americans face.

So we want to do something about it. Democrats don't want to hear speeches about the costs to families. We want to do something. We want to bring down the cost of prescription drugs for seniors first and then for families in general.

If you really care about inflation, most families would say, start with prescription drugs. That is what we are doing. And the Republicans are going to oppose this.

Ironically, Senator MCCONNELL gives a speech calling it socialism to deal with the cost of prescription drugs, and, within an hour, the senior Senator from Iowa gives a speech on the floor of the Senate—Republican Senator—how he wants to cut prescription drug prices for seniors. One of them didn't get the message at the caucus. I think the Senator from Iowa is right, incidentally.

So Democrats are proposing to allow Medicare to negotiate fair prices for drugs. We have been doing that for a long time when it comes to the Veterans' Administration. The Veterans' Administration buys a lot of prescription drugs for our veterans—and I am glad they do—and they negotiate with these companies to get a fair price. We think Medicare ought to do the same thing. It reduces the cost of prescription drugs. It makes them more affordable for seniors.

Now, a lot of people say: Well, if you do that, then the prescription drug companies, the pharmaceutical companies, just aren't going to be able to make it.

Well, here is the reality. Studies have found that Big Pharma could lose \$1

trillion in sales over the next decade and still remain the most profitable industry in America—lose \$1 trillion in sales and still be the most profitable industry. Higher profit margins in pharma than in the telecom industry, than in the defense industry, in the banking industry, and the Republicans are saying they are afraid that they are going to get hurt if consumers can buy drugs at lower prices.

But good news for those who fear that if you cut the amount of money going to pharma, it will cut research. That is not what we have learned. We know Bayer. It has been around a long time. It started off as a German company. It made aspirin. Now they have made some sizable acquisitions in the business.

They make a drug called Xarelto. Now, you would have to watch that television ad 10 or 12 times to be able to spell “Xarelto,” but they are trying to convince American consumers they can't live without it. Bayer spent \$18 billion on sales and marketing last year compared to \$8 billion on research for drugs.

Johnson & Johnson: \$22 billion on sales and marketing, \$12 billion on research. GlaxoSmithKline: \$15 billion on sales and marketing, \$7 billion on research.

Get the pattern? There is more money being spent on advertising than on research for new drugs. Americans get bombarded with nine drug ads on TV every day telling them to ask their doctor for the newest wonder drug. There are only two nations on Earth where you can legally advertise prescription drugs on television. One, of course, is the United States. The other, for some reason, is New Zealand. Filling the airwaves with ads is what Big Pharma does to try to convince customers they can't live without their drugs.

So the claim that allowing Medicare to negotiate a reasonable price for seniors will freeze out Big Pharma's innovation just doesn't wash.

Senator MCCONNELL says there is no “free lunch” when it comes to prescription drug pricing. Let's keep in mind that the 14 largest drug corporations spent more on stock buybacks—lining the pockets of their CEOs—than on research and development over the past 5 years.

So here is what it comes down to. Look at these, just as an illustration. I will do this quickly because Members are showing up to vote. Insulin, discovered by Canadian researchers at the beginning of the 20th century—they surrendered the patent for the drug for a dollar so that it would never be overcharged to consumers because it is a life-or-death drug for those suffering from diabetes.

Take a look, from the year 2004 to the year 2022, at what has happened to the drug insulin cost—insulin cost—on a regular basis, the manufacturing price by year. You can see it tracks all the companies that make insulin. It is