

What they learned stunned them. The same drugs that cost \$525 per month at their local pharmacy cost less than \$100 in Canada. Over the course of the year, the couple will save over \$5,000.

This couple's experience points the way to two commonsense steps Congress could take to guarantee lower drug prices for all Americans.

First, we must make it possible to safely and legally reimport drugs from countries with lower drug prices. Pharmaceutical companies charge American consumers the highest prices in the world. Some medicines cost American patients five times more than they cost patients in other countries.

In effect, our citizens are charged a tax simply for being American. As a result, millions of Americans are having trouble affording lifesaving medication.

Last month, Senators reached a bipartisan agreement to introduce a bill that would allow reimportation of prescription drugs. I want to thank Senators DORGAN and MCCAIN for their extraordinary leadership, and also those who joined with us—Senators SNOWE, KENNEDY, and LOTT, and others on both sides of the aisle.

This is the same medication, manufactured at the same facilities, and inspected by the same rigorous safety standards. It is absurd, even cruel, to force Americans to pay wildly inflated costs, driving hundreds of thousands of Americans into poverty, just to pad the profits of pharmaceutical companies.

Second, it is time to give the Government the same negotiating leverage it has on every other product it buys. When the Government buys computers or automobiles or equipment for our soldiers in uniform, it uses its purchasing power to get the taxpayer a better deal. We should have the same ability to negotiate for drugs on behalf of 41 million Medicare beneficiaries.

The administration has repeatedly opposed this commonsense price-reducing measure and insisted on a provision in the Medicare law that expressly prohibits the Federal Government from using leverage to bargain for lower drug prices.

Let's be clear, if we have the power to save taxpayers money and choose not to use it, we are, in effect, throwing taxpayers' money away. This is foolish and irresponsible. It helps no one but the drug companies who can count on their bloated profits. By defending the system, the administration is merely showing whose side they are truly on.

America's seniors deserve better. The question isn't how we bring down drug costs for seniors. We know how. Rather the question we face is whether we truly want to bring down costs for seniors. The administration and many of our Republican colleagues have given their answer. Over the next several months, seniors are going to see this drug card program is not up to the task of controlling the spiraling drug costs.

Instead of helping seniors afford the drugs they need, it is designed to help drug companies reap the profits to which they are accustomed. Seniors need a real Medicare prescription drug benefit that puts their needs first.

We are going to try to continue to work across the aisle, as we did with the reimportation bill, to find a way to bring down these costs, to find a way to empower the Government to work on behalf of all seniors to negotiate better prices.

There is an answer to the high cost of prescription drugs. The program being introduced today and unveiled this week is not it. We can do better than this, and I hope we will.

I yield the floor.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THOMAS). Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 60 minutes, with the first 30 minutes under the control of the majority leader or his designee, and the second 30 minutes under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee.

The Senator from North Carolina.

#### OVERTIME RULES

Mrs. DOLE. Mr. President, this morning I want to praise the work of Elaine Chao and her staff on the final regulations to strengthen overtime rules for all Americans. Elaine Chao worked with me when I served as Secretary of Transportation, and I know her to be a public servant of the highest intelligence and integrity.

Secretary Chao has identified the problems with outdated regulations and has taken the action necessary to rectify them. I admire her principled stand on such a controversial issue, and I commend her for her foresight in recognizing and working to fix the problems.

The Fair Labor Standards Act regulations have not been revised since 1954, but labor forces, as well as employers, have changed dramatically over that 50-year period. These updates take into account the economic demands of technological advancements, salary growths, and shifts in the labor force that have occurred in the past half century, and they modernize these regulations for a modern workforce.

Updating the rules is crucial to the 6.7 million Americans making \$23,660 or less a year because until now only workers earning less than \$8,060 annually were guaranteed overtime. The final rule provides a greatly needed increase, and, in addition, 1.3 million white-collar workers will benefit from their new earnings. The benefits do not stop there. More than 5 million workers will enjoy an ironclad guarantee of overtime rights, regardless of job duties, under this final rule.

As a woman well acquainted with labor issues across this Nation, I have

watched the increase of Fair Labor Standards Act class action suits over the years with growing concern. To my dismay, the number of suits has almost tripled—triple—since 1997. Even worse, these lawsuits are estimated to cost our economy approximately \$2 billion a year. The vague language in the laws has allowed an opportunity for class action attorneys to render a defense extremely expensive and difficult to counter, regardless of how well the employer complies with the law.

These suits have placed even greater pressure on our already overburdened judicial system, and they reinforce the need for these rules.

Certain groups out to prevent the Department of Labor from improving the rules and making the necessary clarifications have greatly exaggerated the effects of the rule. Fortunately, their efforts were unsuccessful.

Critics expressed concern about who is and who is not potentially affected by the new rules—why, for instance, a first responder's overtime is protected. There is no question that America has a profound sense of the significance of our first responders, especially following the events of 9/11. This new protection extends to all of our first responders, our police officers, firefighters, paramedics, nurses, and emergency medical technicians.

For those who feared team leaders could be unfairly disadvantaged under the proposed rules, let me assure you the final rules make it clear blue-collar workers who are team leaders are guaranteed overtime pay. Additionally, white-collar team leaders will enjoy greater protections than they do today.

I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will give careful consideration to the clear benefits these final rules will afford our Nation before voting. I believe these final rules are the product of constructive feedback that is afforded to all proposed rules through the public comment period. In this case, I am told 75,000 to 80,000 comments were received and analyzed. With the new rules in place, workers will clearly know their rights and employers their responsibilities.

Again, I thank Secretary Chao for her extraordinary leadership and vision in making millions of low-income workers eligible for overtime, updating the antiquated and confusing rules and regulations, and taking this important step toward eliminating the billions of dollars in lawsuits related to overtime cases.

I quote from today's Washington Post:

What's needed now is not to block these regulations but to ensure that they are vigorously enforced with an eye to protecting the vulnerable workers the law was intended to benefit.

I urge all my colleagues to support this rule and vote no on the Harkin amendment.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority whip.