

PROTECT OUR CARE

**** Weekly Wrap Up ****

[October 23 – October 29, 2021]



U.S. Representatives Susan Wild and Sharice Davids joined Protect Our Care's Executive Director Brad Woodhouse for a virtual press conference on Medicare drug price negotiation.

Rep. Peter Welch Joined Experts and Advocates to Issue a Dire Warning Against Members Considering Dropping Medicare Negotiations From the Build Back Better Act

[Listen to the Call Here](#)

Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT-AL) joined Hart Research's Geoff Garin, Brookings Institution's Dr. Richard Frank, Patients for Affordable Drugs' David Mitchell and Protect Our Care to discuss the latest developments in Washington as Congress works to pass budget reconciliation legislation. During the call, speakers sounded the alarm against Congress passing a completely watered-down version of Medicare negotiations in the Build Back Better Act.

As President Biden and patient advocates are fighting tirelessly to include Medicare negotiations and other critical health care investments in the Build Back Better Act, Big Pharma has tightened its grip on its friends in Congress -- potentially threatening the most popular and transformative measure in the entire bill. Recent reporting indicates that as

Congress comes closer to a deal, a small handful of members are trying to gut Medicare negotiations to the point of being nearly meaningless.

"When we fight for price negotiation, we are standing up for patients, consumers, and employers who get hammered by the skyrocketing cost of prescription drugs," said U.S. Representative Peter Welch (D-VT-AL). "Average prescription drug prices in the US are far higher than anywhere else in the world, and we must take action to protect our citizens from the constant price gouging. This is a source of enormous anxiety for folks who need these drugs for themselves or the ones they love. It's outrageous and it's unjustifiable and it would be political malpractice for Congress to do nothing. By saving money -- simply by stopping this ongoing pharma rip off -- we can help Americans afford lifesaving drugs, whether they voted for Trump or voted for Biden."

"As we head into the final days of debate, we must understand that there is overwhelming consensus in this country that the amount pharmaceutical companies charge for prescription drugs is unreasonable," said Geoff Garin, President of Hart Research. "Support for Medicare negotiations is nearly universal, and establishing a system to lower drug prices is a top priority for voters. Even in the face of the strongest opposition from pharmaceutical companies, voters continue to support lowering prescription drug prices through Medicare negotiations."

"Medicare negotiations are targeting areas where the market is failing. Half of the Medicare Parts B and D prescription drugs have been on the market for long periods and have received massive profits while having little effect on new science or new cures," said Dr. Richard Frank, Director of the USC-Brookings Center Schaeffer Initiative on Health Policy. "However, the evidence pharmaceutical companies are using to oppose Medicare negotiations does not highlight that. It is important to keep that in mind when accessing the claims against giving Medicare the power to lower prescription drug prices."

"As a patient with an incurable blood cancer, my doctors have me on a four drug combination with a list price of \$900,000 per year," said David Mitchell, founder of Patients For Affordable Drugs. "We are closer than we have been in almost two decades to achieving reforms. The key now is to hold the line on the last minute push by Pharma and its handmaidens in Congress to find ways to gut the drug pricing provisions of Build Back Better and render the bill ineffective. Let's be clear: Medicare must be able to negotiate over any and all high cost drugs that have little or no competition in both Parts B and D. Period."

“As Congress closes in on a deal to transform health care for millions of Americans, Big Pharma’s friends in Washington are working overtime to eviscerate Medicare negotiations and protect drug company profits. The so-called alternatives being floated -- prohibiting negotiations for drugs that are still on patent and have no competition, and removing penalties for drug companies that refuse to negotiate at all -- will not meaningfully lower drug prices for patients, period,” said Protect Our Care Chair Leslie Dach. “Watering down Medicare negotiations means lawmakers are turning their backs on the Americans who are being forced to choose between affording essential medications and putting food on the table or paying rent. Let’s be clear: the Build Back Better health care provisions, and specifically giving Medicare the power to negotiate, are the most important measures in the entire bill. Democrats ran and won on health care in 2020, and voters are demanding they deliver on their promises and lower drug prices now.”

Frontline Democratic Reps. Wild and Davids Deliver Dire Warning Against Congress Backing Down on Medicare Negotiations



[Watch the Full Event Here.](#)

U.S. Representatives Susan Wild (D-PA-07) and Sharice Davids (D-KS-03) joined Protect Our Care for a virtual press conference to call on their colleagues in Congress to deliver lower drug prices by giving Medicare the full power to negotiate. As lawmakers work to finalize budget legislation, press reports have indicated that Big Pharma has tightened its grip on its allies in Congress -- potentially threatening prescription drug pricing reform altogether. During the call, Reps. Wild and Davids made clear that Medicare negotiation is among the most important provisions in the entire Build Back Better Act, and the measure cannot be watered down if Congress wants to meaningfully lower prescription drug prices for patients.

Reps. Wild and Davids are leading the charge for lower drug prices for all Americans. In July, Rep. Wild led a letter from frontline House Democrats including Rep. Sharice Davids to Democratic leadership urging them to include Medicare negotiation power in the upcoming reconciliation bill. Rep. Davids recently wrote an op-ed in the Washington Post with other frontline Democrats arguing that Congress must stand up to drug companies and ensure that patients come first by giving Medicare the power to negotiate drug prices.

“No American should be forced into a possible choice between life-saving medicine or food on the table, and it’s unconscionable that pharmaceutical companies are still able to charge Americans several times more than what they charge for the same drugs in other countries – all while still recording massive profits,” said U.S. Representative Susan Wild. “I still firmly believe we must include drug pricing reform in the Build Back Better Act, not only because it would help pay for the bill, but because it’s what an overwhelming, bipartisan majority of the American people are demanding from Congress. We cannot let this once-in-a-generation opportunity pass us by.”

"We have a solution. Medicare negotiations would help save our government and private businesses billions of dollars and reduce premiums, prescription drug prices, and overall health care costs for everyone," said U.S. Representative Sharice Davids. "We are in the 11th hour to make a difference in people's lives, and we must demonstrate that we are here in service of our communities and constituents and not in service of pharmaceutical companies."

“The so-called alternatives to Medicare negotiation being pushed by pro-Pharma members would maintain the status quo where drug companies can dictate whatever price they want while Americans pay three times more for drugs as people in other countries,” said Protect Our Care Executive Director Brad Woodhouse. “Giving Medicare the full power to negotiate for lower prices is not just the right thing to do -- it’s the smart thing to do. Democrats ran and won on health care in 2020, and frontline members understand that if we do nothing to meaningfully lower drug prices for patients, the Democratic majority is at stake. It’s plain and simple: this is not the time for capitulation to drug companies. Congress must act now to give Medicare the power to negotiate for lower drug prices for all Americans.”

**Closing the Medicaid Coverage Gap in Build Back Better Act Will
Save Lives, Improve Coverage for Millions, Reduce Racial
Disparities in Health Care**

Democrats secured a provision to close the Medicaid coverage gap as part of the Build Back Better Act framework. Closing the Medicaid coverage gap will finally extend health insurance to over four million people in the 12 states that have rejected Medicaid expansion and address deep racial inequities in our health care system. In response, Protect Our Care Executive Director Brad Woodhouse released the following statement:

“This historic expansion of health insurance coverage will finally ensure that Americans in states like Georgia, South Carolina, and Wisconsin will be able to access affordable, quality care. Because of Republicans’ partisan war on health care, millions of people have been left uninsured in 12 states -- it’s just not right. Thanks to the hard work of Majority Whip James E. Clyburn and Senators Rev. Raphael Warnock, Tammy Baldwin, Jon Ossoff, as well as President Biden and the Democratic leadership, the promise of Medicaid expansion in every state is finally a reality. Medicaid is a lifeline; it reduces racial disparities in health care, creates healthier communities and strengthens economies. The health care measures in Build Back Better will lower costs and improve and expand access to lifesaving care.”

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"When we fight for price negotiation, we are standing up for patients, consumers, and employers who get hammered by the skyrocketing cost of prescription drugs," said U.S. Representative Peter Welch (D-VT-AL). "Average prescription drug prices in the US are far higher than anywhere else in the world, and we must take action to protect our citizens from the constant price gouging. This is a source of enormous anxiety for folks who need these drugs for themselves or the ones they love. It's outrageous and it's unjustifiable and it would be political malpractice for Congress to do nothing. By saving money -- simply by stopping this ongoing pharma rip off -- we can help Americans afford lifesaving drugs, whether they voted for Trump or voted for Biden."

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Statement from Protect Our Care on the Build Back Better Framework

Under the leadership of President Joe Biden, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Democrats reached a historic agreement to pass the most significant expansion of American health care in more than a decade. The framework includes reducing health care premiums for people who buy health insurance on their own, extending coverage to millions by closing the Medicaid coverage gap, expanding Medicare benefits to cover hearing, and investing \$150 billion to expand home care for seniors and people with disabilities. Health care remains a fundamental part of the Build Back Better agenda, and the proposals to reduce costs and expand care are overwhelmingly popular with voters across the political spectrum. In response, Protect Our Care Chair Leslie Dach issued the following statement:

“Thanks to the leadership of President Biden, Democrats are going to pass the most significant expansion to health care since the Affordable Care Act. The framework announced today will increase coverage and lower costs for millions of Americans, and working families will now have the health care they need. Today’s announcement shows President Biden and Democrats in Congress are working to deliver on a future where health care is a right, not a privilege.

“The Build Back Better Act will lower health insurance premiums for more than nine million Americans who buy health care on their own and provide coverage for millions of families. Closing the Medicaid coverage gap is the single most important step Congress can take to reduce racial inequities in health care, and it will save lives and strengthen families. Expanding hearing benefits in Medicare and investing in home care will significantly improve the health and well-being of seniors and people with disabilities nationwide.

“The failure to include any measures to lower prescription drug prices is a victory for Big Pharma and a profound loss for the American people. As a result of millions of dollars in campaign contributions, and the actions of a handful of pro-Pharma lawmakers, the current framework would allow drug companies to continue to charge outrageous prices, and Americans will continue to struggle to pay for the medications they need to survive. We pledge to keep fighting for lower drug costs and urge others to do the same as the bill is considered by the House and Senate.”

NEW: Radio Ad in Rep. Rice’s District Urges Her to Do the Right Thing for New Yorkers and Lower Drug Prices Now

[Listen to the Ad Here.](#)

Protect Our Care announced a new radio ad calling on U.S. Representative Kathleen Rice (D-NY-04) to support giving Medicare the power to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices for all Americans. The new ad comes as President Biden and patient advocates are fighting tirelessly to include Medicare negotiations and other critical health care investments in the Build Back Better Act. However, Big Pharma has tightened its grip on its allies in Congress -- potentially threatening Medicare negotiation, the most popular and transformative health care measure in the entire bill. The ad makes clear it’s not too late for Rep. Rice to do the right thing for patients and stand up to Big Pharma for lower drug prices now.

“New Yorkers are tired of the broken system that puts Big Pharma’s profits above the needs of working families,” said Protect Our Care Executive Director Brad Woodhouse. “It is shameful that, in the wealthiest country in the world, families are forced to choose between affording essential medications and putting food on the table or paying rent. Under President Biden’s strong leadership, Congress finally has the opportunity to put an end to Big Pharma’s unchecked greed and lower prescription drug prices, and Rep. Rice must get on board to bring long-overdue relief to the American people.”

Script (60s):

[President Biden]: “We’re going to bring down the cost of prescription drugs by allowing Medicare to finally be able to negotiate drug prices with producers.”

That's President Joe Biden, promising that his new Build Back Better plan will lower prescription drug prices.

For years, the big drug companies have been charging us whatever they want for the medicine that we need.. And now Americans pay 3-times more for the same prescription drugs as they do in other countries around the world.

It's not fair. It's not right. And we finally have a solution.

But, so far, Congresswoman Kathleen Rice has voted against it – against President Biden's plan that will give Medicare the power to negotiate lower drug prices.

To get it done, we need Congresswoman Rice to stand up for seniors, stand up for working people and stand up for patients.

Call her at (516) 739-3008 and tell Congresswoman Rice to support Medicare negotiations for lower prescription drug prices.

Memo to Congress From the America People: Give Medicare the Power to Negotiate Lower Drug Prices Now

Democrats announced a framework for the Build Back Better Act. While the historic agreement will dramatically lower health costs and expand care, it is missing a key plan: giving Medicare the power to negotiate lower prescription drug prices. As Big Pharma and their allies in Congress continue to fight against reform, Democratic leaders are working to ensure meaningful Medicare negotiation is included in the Build Back Better Act. Poll after poll shows that the #1 element of President Biden's Build Back Better agenda is Medicare negotiation. Failure to include negotiation in Build Back Better means maintaining the broken system that lets drug companies dictate outrageous prices while millions of Americans struggle to afford their medications.

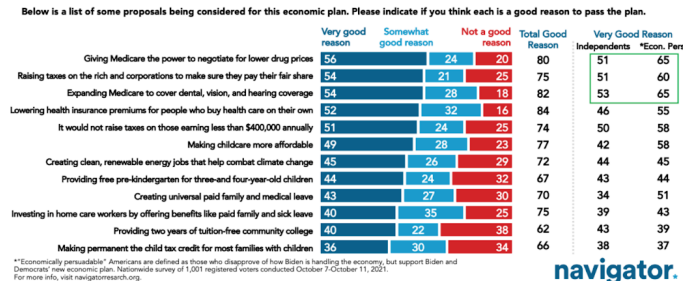
Giving Medicare the full power to negotiate for lower prices is not just the right thing to do -- it's the smart thing to do. Democrats ran and won on health care in 2018 and 2020. It's plain and simple: This is not the time to cower to Big Pharma's demands -- Medicare negotiation must remain in the final Build Back Better Act to lower drug prices for all Americans.

RECENT POLLING

Navigator Poll Finds Medicare Price Negotiation As The Best Reason Among Voters To Support Build Back Better. “Independents and economically persuadable Americans say giving Medicare the power to negotiate lower drug prices [is] the best reason to pass the plan.” [Navigator, [10/15/21](#)]

Best Reasons to Pass Build Back Better Are Medicare Drug Price Negotiation, Taxing the Rich, and Expanding Medicare

Independents and economically persuadable Americans say giving Medicare the power to negotiate lower drug prices, raising taxes on the rich and corporations, and expanding Medicare are the best reasons to pass the plan.



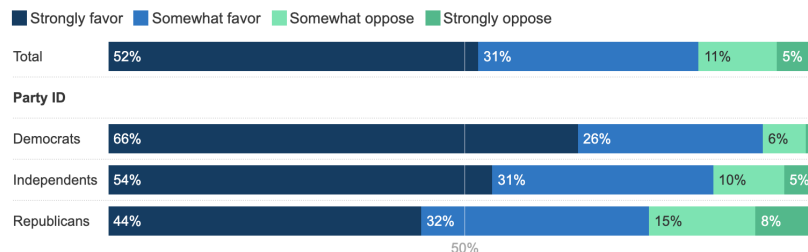
Kaiser Family Foundation Poll Finds Strong Support For Negotiation Across Political Spectrum. “Of those in support: “83% total, 95% of Democrats, 82% of independents, and 71% of Republicans.” [Kaiser Family Foundation, [10/12/21](#)]

- Americans Favor Arguments For Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Than Those Made Against It. “One-third of the public say the argument *from those opposed* to drug price negotiations is convincing compared to a large majority (84%) who say they found the argument *from those in favor* convincing.” [Kaiser Family Foundation, [10/12/21](#)]

Figure 1

Large Majorities Favor Allowing The Federal Government To Negotiate With Drug Companies On Prescription Drug Prices

Do you **favor** or **oppose** allowing the federal government to negotiate with drug companies to get a lower price on prescription drugs for people with Medicare and private insurance?

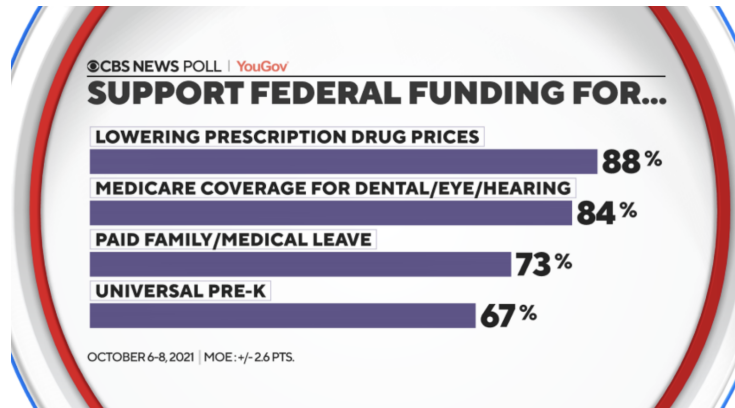


NOTE: See topline for full question wording.
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (Sept. 23-Oct. 4, 2021) • PNG

KFF

CBS Poll Finds Overwhelming Support For Build Back Better Health Provisions, With Drug Price Negotiations At The Top. “88 percent of respondents support federal drug price

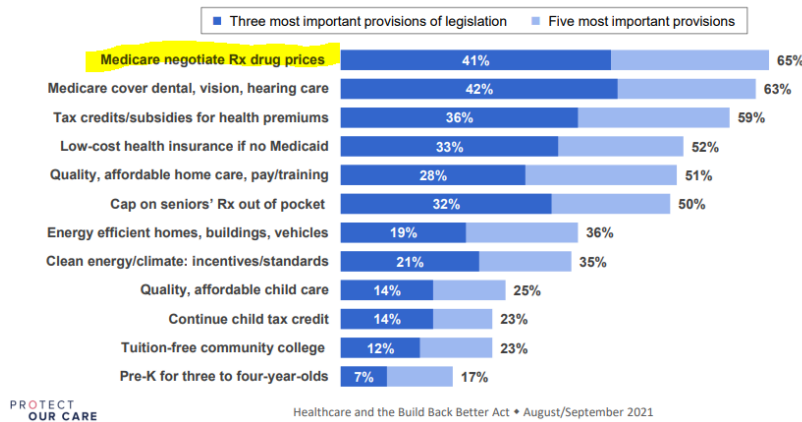
negotiations, with 84 percent in support of expanding Medicare to include dental, vision, and hearing coverage.” [CBS, [10/10/21](#)]



Build Back Together Survey Across 48 Battleground Congressional Districts Finds Allowing Medicare To Negotiate Drug Prices Is The Most Popular Component Of The Build Back Better Plan. “Allowing Medicare to negotiate lower prices was the most popular of the 16 components of the Build Back Better plan tested. Over two-thirds of battleground district voters (71%) say this component makes them more likely to support the reconciliation plan. It is especially popular with seniors, but also the most popular component among both independents and those voters who are persuadable on the reconciliation plan.” [ALG Research, [9/29/21](#)]

Hart Research Poll Finds Hart Medicare Negotiation Was The Most Important Element In Driving Support For The Build Back Better Package. “When making the case for the Build Back Better Act, it's significantly strengthened by including health care. Support for the investments in critical priorities in the act is strong (74-26%) but is significantly stronger (80-20%) when the description includes that the plan reduces health care costs and the price of prescription drugs.” [Hart Research, [9/13/21](#)]

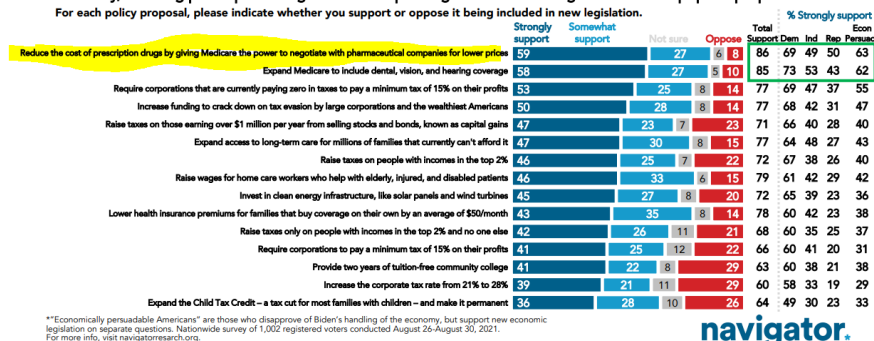
The healthcare provisions are the most important elements in driving support for the package.



NAVIGATOR Polls Finds Economically Persuadable Americans Want Prescription Drug Negotiation. “86 percent of respondents support reducing the cost of prescription drugs by giving Medicare the power to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for lower prices, with 69 percent of Democrats, 49 of independents, 50 percent of Republicans, and 63 percent of economically persuadable Americans strongly supporting the measure.” [NAVIGATOR, 9/8/21]

All Parts of the Plan Are Popular, Especially Medicare Negotiation and Expanding Medicare

Among persuadable Americans* who support new economic legislation but disapprove of Biden’s handling of the economy, reducing prescription drug costs and expanding Medicare coverage are the most popular proposals. For each policy proposal, please indicate whether you support or oppose it being included in new legislation.

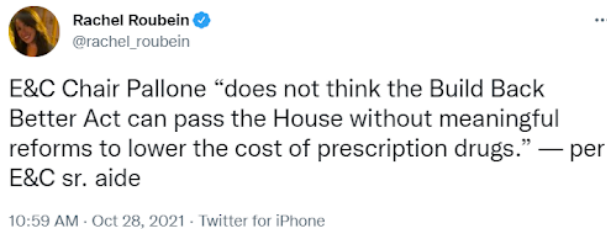


ROUNDUP: Members of Congress Pledge to Include Medicare Negotiation in Final BBB Package

Democrats announced a framework for the Build Back Better Act. While the agreement includes historic measures to dramatically lower health costs and expand care, it is missing a

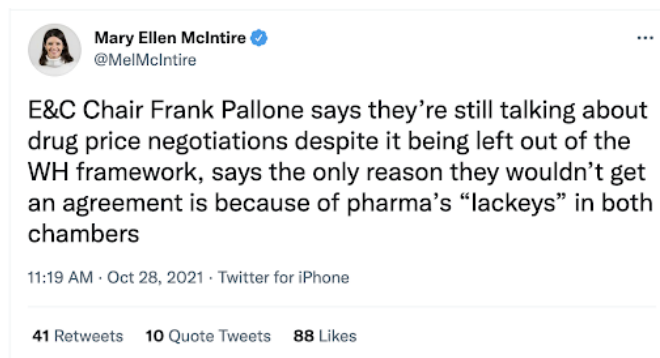
critical provision: giving Medicare the power to negotiate lower prescription drug prices for all Americans. Medicare negotiation is the most popular and transformative health care measure in the entire bill. As Big Pharma and their allies in Congress continue to fight against reform, Democrats from across the political spectrum agree that Medicare negotiation must remain in the final package.

House Energy and Commerce Chair Frank Pallone (D-NJ): “[Pallone] does not think the Build Back Better Act can pass the House without meaningful reforms to lower the cost of prescription drugs.” [@rachel_roubein, 10/28/21]



House Energy and Commerce Chair Frank Pallone (D-NJ): “I remain committed to finalizing an agreement that includes price negotiation, a cap on seniors’ out-of-pocket drug spending, and a penalty for Big Pharma companies that unfairly raise prices.” [Time, 10/28/21]

House Energy and Commerce Chair Frank Pallone (D-NJ): “I still feel confident that we’re going to get a drug pricing initiative, but I just want you all to know that pharma is doing whatever they can to try to prevent any drug pricing provision being in this bill. And if it doesn’t get in the bill, it’s totally because of them and their lackeys here in the House and the Senate.” [Roll Call, 10/28/21]



Senate Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden (D-OR): “We’re staying at it. This is too important.” [Time, 10/28/21]



Senate Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden (D-OR): “The deal isn’t done until the Senate acts.” [The Washington Post, 10/28/21]

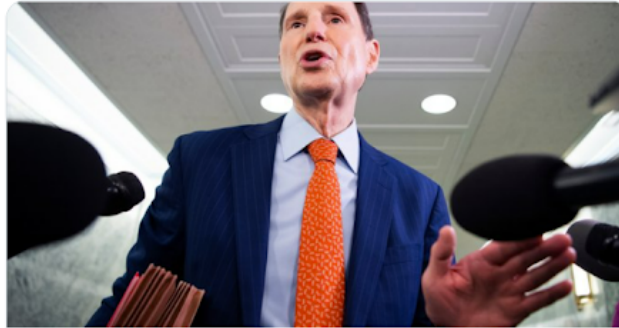


Senate Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden (D-OR): “The way I would put it — if you want you know, my bottom line — it is non-negotiable that negotiation become a part of Medicare now.” [Roll Call, 10/28/21]



Roll Call  @rollcall · 14h

“The way I would put it — if you want you know, my bottom line — it is non-negotiable that negotiation become a part of Medicare now,” Sen. Ron Wyden said.



rollcall.com

Democrats vow to continue fight on drug pricing in budget bill - Roll Call
The new White House framework calls only for repealing rule requiring benefit managers and insurance companies to share rebates.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-VT): “I have some serious concerns about what is not in the bill. For years, we have been talking about lowering the cost of prescription drugs and that is not in the bill. At all.” [The Wall Street Journal, 10/29/21]

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-VT): “Bottom line is that any reconciliation bill must include serious negotiations on the part of Medicare with the pharmaceutical industry, lower the cost of prescription drugs.” [@MedicareWorld, 10/26/21]



Medicare World @MedicareWorld · Oct 26

“Bottom line is that any reconciliation bill must include serious negotiations on the part of Medicare with the pharmaceutical industry, lower the **cost of prescription drugs**. That’s what the American people want,” -Bernie Sanders



thehill.com

Sanders draws red lines on Medicare expansion, drug pricing plan in Senate Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) said on Tuesday that a deal on President Biden’s spending bill must expand ...

House Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal (D-MA): “It’s not dead. I think that’s a fair statement.” [The Washington Post, 10/29/21]

Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN): “It is time for Americans to get a better deal and I won’t stop fighting for it.” [@amyklobuchar, 10/28/21]



Amy Klobuchar ✓
@amyklobuchar

...

Bottom line: drug prices are too high. It is time for Americans to get a better deal and I won’t stop fighting for it.

4:49 PM · Oct 28, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT): “We should keep fighting to get the best deal in the package and push for it to include negotiation of drug prices.” [@ChrisMurphyCT, 10/28/21]



Chris Murphy ✓
@ChrisMurphyCT

...

We should keep fighting to get the best deal in the package and push for it to include negotiation of drug prices.



Chris Murphy ✓ @ChrisMurphyCT · 20h

The prescription drug deal on the table isn’t everything I want, but it’s not a fig leaf. It’s likely \$100B in cuts to drug company profits with the money to be used to cut out of pocket costs for seniors in half.

1:21 PM · Oct 28, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

Representative Susan Wild (D-PA-07): “I’m not backing down.” [@RepSusanWild, 10/27/21]



Rep. Susan Wild ✓
@RepSusanWild

...

We are facing the eleventh hour in the fight to include Medicare negotiation in the Build Back Better Act.

I can’t make this any clearer:

The American people want lower drug prices and we have an opportunity right in front of us to deliver it for them.

I’m not backing down.

5:31 PM · Oct 27, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

22 Retweets 4 Quote Tweets 70 Likes

Pro-Pharma Efforts to Block Medicare Negotiations Receives Widespread Backlash From Lawmakers, Experts, and Patient Groups

As President Biden and patient advocates are fighting tirelessly to give Medicare the power to lower prescription drug prices in the Build Back Better Act, press reports have indicated that Big Pharma has tightened its grip on its allies in Congress -- potentially threatening prescription drug pricing reform altogether. The reports indicate that pro-Pharma members are actually trying to prohibit negotiations for the drugs that cost the most for people - brand name drugs, those still on patent, and those that already have no competition.

This would maintain the status quo where drug companies can dictate whatever price they want and Americans pay three times more for the same drug as people in other countries. Patient groups and Democratic lawmakers from across the political spectrum firmly agree: this is not the time for capitulation to drug companies. Congress must act now to give Medicare real power to negotiate for lower drug prices for all Americans.

Representative Peter Welch (D-VT-AL): "It's Outrageous And It's Unjustifiable And It Would Be Political Malpractice For Congress To Do Nothing." "Average prescription drug prices in the US are far higher than anywhere else in the world, and we must take action to protect our citizens from the constant price gouging. This is a source of enormous anxiety for folks who need these drugs for themselves or the ones they love. It's outrageous and it's unjustifiable and it would be political malpractice for Congress to do nothing. By saving money -- simply by stopping this ongoing pharma rip off -- we can help Americans afford lifesaving drugs, whether they voted for Trump or voted for Biden." [Protect Our Care Press Call, [10/25/21](#)]

- Rep. Welch: Alternative Proposals "Will Leave Us At The Mercy Of Monopoly Pricing Power." "Lawmakers are now weighing only negotiating the drug costs after their period of exclusivity has expired, which would exclude many of the costliest drugs and incentivize pharmaceutical companies to extend their patents as long as possible. The costs would be pegged to those paid by VA instead of the international reference pricing scheme of [H.R. 3 \(117\)](#). 'There isn't negotiation where it matters. It will leave us at the mercy of monopoly pricing power,' Rep. [Peter Welch](#) (D-Vt.) lamented on a call with reporters Monday. 'It just breaks the back of the whole concept.'" [Politico, [10/26/21](#)]

Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN): "Limiting Negotiations to Off-Patent Drugs Is Exactly What Pharma Wants." [[@amyklobuchar](#), [10/22/21](#)]



Amy Klobuchar ✓
@amyklobuchar

...

When we pay more for drugs than any other country despite major taxpayer-funded research, it's time to stop admiring the problem. The time to act is now. Limiting negotiations to off-patent drugs is exactly what pharma wants. But whoever is proposing this knows that already.

8:50 PM · Oct 22, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

1,549 Retweets 55 Quote Tweets 7,378 Likes

Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR): Without Negotiation, “Pharmaceutical Companies Will Continue Hiking Drug Prices Much Faster Than Wages Grow For Typical Americans.” “America is at a crossroads when it comes to paying for prescription drugs. Down one path, pharmaceutical companies will continue hiking drug prices much faster than wages grow for typical Americans. They’ll continue launching headline-grabbing drugs at outrageous list prices, even when there are questions about whether those drugs truly work. In this scenario, the result of drug companies’ unchecked power could be that many more Americans will borrow for life-saving treatments the way they borrow for homes and educations.” [Boston Globe, 10/25/21]

OPINION

Let Medicare negotiate lower drug prices

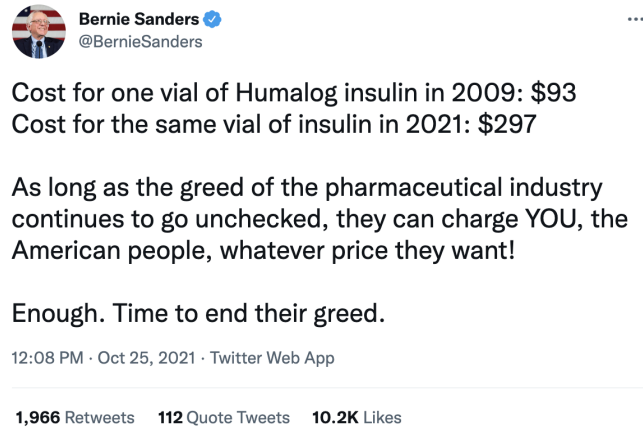
An estimated 18 million Americans were unable to afford a prescription due to its cost at some point this year. The United States is paying three times more than other countries for brand-name drugs.

By Ron Wyden Updated October 25, 2021, 3:00 a.m.



Retiree Donna Weiner shows some of the daily prescription medications that she needs and pays over \$6,000 a year through a Medicare prescription drug plan on Oct. 5 in Longwood, Fla. Weiner supports giving Medicare authority to negotiate drug prices. PHELAN M. EBENHACK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Senator Bernie Sanders (D-VT): “As Long As The Greed Of The Pharmaceutical Industry Continues To Go Unchecked, They Can Charge You, The American People, Whatever Price They Want!” [@BernieSanders, 10/25/21]





**Representative Jared Golden (D-ME-02): “One Of The Strongest And Most Effective Provisions In The Bill -- Prescription Drug Reform -- Is Under Threat. It Must Be Saved.”
“But amid all the push and pull, one of the strongest and most effective provisions in the bill — prescription drug reform — is under threat. It must be saved. The impact of this provision on Mainers, particularly Maine seniors, would make a difference in hundreds of thousands of lives in our state.” [Jared Golden Medium, 10/24/21]**

We Have Hard Choices Ahead. Lowering Drug Prices Isn’t One of Them



AARP & Patients for Affordable Drugs: “This Is Not A Moment To Equivocate, Delay, Or Dilute The Foundational Elements Of Effective Reform.” “This is not a moment to equivocate, delay, or dilute the foundational elements of effective reform. This is the moment to enact legislation that will help millions of Americans who are forgoing drugs they have been prescribed but cannot afford, rationing, and choosing between paying rent or paying for prescriptions they need.” [AARP & Patients for Affordable Drugs, 10/21/21]

October 21, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
15-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Schumer,

We stand at an historic moment. Within days, Congress is expected to release a framework to deliver on a promise to let Medicare negotiate lower prescription drug prices for the American people. We can finally undo a policy that has left patients and consumers at the mercy of drug corporations that dictate prices of brand-name drugs, forcing Americans to pay three times what other wealthy nations pay for the same medicines. We urge Congress and the President to seize this moment and finally get the job done.

A recent independent survey showed more than 2 out of 10 Americans regardless of party support this reform. Even after hearing the industry's false claims that negotiation will bring harm to patients and consumers, the level of support for Medicare negotiation does not slip. It is not an afterthought for the American people; it is the single most popular element of the Build Back Better plan.

To fulfill the promise of lower drug prices, legislation must contain key elements including effective negotiation on drugs that burden patients and taxpayers with the highest prices, drugs covered under both Medicare Parts D and B, and drugs that do not face meaningful competition. To stop the industry practice of price gouging, drug companies should be penalized for annual price increases that exceed the rate of inflation. For the first time in Medicare, there must be a hard cap on annual out-of-pocket drug costs for beneficiaries. In the end, the legislation must lower prices and out-of-pocket costs while keeping premiums affordable. It must produce significant savings for consumers and taxpayers. These key elements must be included in the consensus framework.

Done right, negotiation will stimulate innovation that patients and older Americans want and need. As long as drug companies retain their current power to raise prices at will to drive profits and trigger executive bonuses, they have far less incentive to take risk and invest in research and development to find innovative new drugs that could justifiably command higher prices and save lives. By making clear that Medicare will pay the best prices for the best drugs, negotiation will encourage innovation as companies pursue better drugs.

This is not a moment to equivocate, delay, or dilute the foundational elements of effective reform. This is the moment to enact legislation that will help millions of Americans who are forgoing drugs they have been prescribed but cannot afford, rationing, and choosing between paying rent or paying for prescriptions they need.

Bill Sweeney, Senior Vice President, Government Affairs at AARP: “Letting Medicare negotiate is the BEST and most effective policy to lower prices and save Medicare money.” [@BillSweeneyDC, 10/26/21]



Bill Sweeney
@BillSweeneyDC

...

Prescription drug prices are out of control. Letting Medicare negotiate is the BEST and most effective policy to lower prices and save Medicare money.

When seniors refill their drugs, they will KNOW if Congress chose to fight for them, or if Pharma gets to keep ripping them off.

11:02 AM · Oct 26, 2021 · TweetDeck

Geoff Gain, President of Hart Research: "Support For Medicare Negotiations Is Nearly Universal, And Establishing A System To Lower Drug Prices Is A Top Priority For Voters." "As we head into the final days of debate, we must understand that there is overwhelming consensus in this country that the amount pharmaceutical companies charge for prescription drugs is unreasonable. Support for Medicare negotiations is nearly universal, and establishing a system to lower drug prices is a top priority for voters. Even in the face of the strongest opposition from pharmaceutical companies, voters continue to support lowering prescription drug prices through Medicare negotiations." [Protect Our Care Press Call, [10/25/21](#)]

Defend The Science Weekly Brief

Republicans have continued to try and "out-Trump" each other, doing whatever it takes to distract from their failed response to the pandemic. Senator Rand Paul and his band of spineless extremists continue to attack Dr. Fauci and experts, spreading disinformation and conspiracy theories that put more lives in grave danger.

Senator Paul went on Fox to continue to falsely accuse NIH of funding gain of function research that could have led to the creation of COVID-SARS V2 and Dr. Fauci of not telling the truth about it to Congress. This is an intentional lie by Senator Paul. He cites as proof a letter from NIH Director Francis Collins, that actually explicitly denies this. More on that [here](#).

Republicans are also pushing a conspiracy theory so out-of-touch and ludicrous, they are making themselves into caricatures of themselves. They are now circulating an insane, almost comedic accusation that Dr. Fauci is...wait for it...torturing puppies. We are officially through the looking glass. Rep. Madison Cawthorn (NC-11) jumped fully on the bandwagon and [took to the House floor](#) to ask Speaker Pelosi to create a special task force to find out the "true origins of Covid-19" and also investigate "why the hell Americans are funding torturing puppies in Africa." Check out the column by the [Washington Post](#)'s Dana Milbank who broke down this ridiculous line of attack.

Meanwhile, as mask and vaccine mandates continue to be proven effective measures in keeping Americans safe and healthy, Republican Governors continue to push harmful policies to appease their fringe base as they let their residents' lives hang in the balance.



This week's documents are:

- FACT CHECK: SENATOR RAND PAUL STILL LYING AND SMEARING FAUCI WITH DEBUNKED GAIN OF FUNCTION CONSPIRACY THEORY
- SPINELESS: GOVERNORS DESANTIS AND ABBOTT TRY TO “OUT-TRUMP” ONE ANOTHER
- THE REVIEWS ARE IN: DR. FAUCI DOCUMENTARY HIGHLIGHTS HIS “INCREDIBLE BODY OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE”
- REALITY CHECK: “GAIN OF FUNCTION” CONSPIRACY THEORY INTENTIONALLY MISLEADING AND IRRELEVANT TO UNCOVERING COVID-19 ORIGINS
- FACT CHECK: NO, NIH AND DR. FAUCI DID NOT FUND THE CREATION OF THE CORONAVIRUS

Republicans have shown they will stop at nothing to divert attention from Donald Trump’s, and their own collectively terrible record of mismanaging the pandemic response by spreading disinformation, creating harmful conspiracy theories, and attacking President Biden and Dr. Fauci.

- As Republicans continue to double down on mismanaging the pandemic response, the American people have made it clear that they back science and proven effective measures like vaccine and mask mandates.
- This week, they stooped to new levels of desperation. Republicans are now circulating an insane, almost comedic accusation that Dr. Fauci is...wait for it...torturing puppies. Check out the column by the Washington Post’s Dana Milbank for more on this insane conspiracy theory.
- Simultaneously, Republican governors in FL, TX, GA, NH, and other states continue to push harmful policies that put their residents at great risk as we get closer to the holidays and flu season.
- Unfortunately for Republicans, the science and the facts contradict their baseless lies *every single time*.
- Governors DeSantis (FL) and Abbott (TX) have been particularly damaging to their states as they continue to trade the safety and wellbeing of their constituents in order to pander to their fringe base.
 - In Florida: Governor DeSantis called a special session to end COVID restrictions in the state. Recently, appointed Dr. Joseph Ladapo to the position of General Surgeon--an extremist who has peddled dangerous misinformation, pushed quack cures like hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin and called masks a “distraction.”
 - Recent reports now state that Lapado will bring home a \$362,000 paycheck each year, a massive increase from his predecessor and a slap

in the face to Floridians who are facing economic hardships due to the pandemic.

- In Texas: Governor Abbott recently issued an executive order, banning "any entity" in the state from enforcing a vaccine mandate. This move is a direct contradiction from the popular and protective move by President Biden to require vaccines for workers at companies with 100 employees or more.
- But despite Republicans' shared effort to sabotage the pandemic response, new reports by the Washington Post and countless other news outlets have made it clear: mask and vaccines are working.
- Politico and Bloomberg recently reported on the precarious nature of forcing such unpopular and extreme policies will be for them at the polls as approval ratings for both DeSantis and Abbott have dropped and people are wary of their continued war against proven protection measures like mask and vaccine mandates.
- Moreover, the Associated Press recently reported that a majority of Americans approve of Biden's handling of COVID-19.
 - A majority [57%] of Americans approve of Biden's handling of COVID-19
 - About two-thirds of Americans are at least somewhat confident the COVID-19 vaccines will be effective against virus variants.
 - Roughly 8 in 10 trust their doctors and other health care providers

While Republicans suffered through a no good, very bad week of headlines calling out their failed pandemic response...

- NYT: On Vaccines and More, How Republican Cowardice Harms America
- Brookings: Pandemic Politics: Red state governors are in trouble for their Covid leadership
- Kaiser Health: Republicans Try New Tactics To Push Back Against Vaccine Mandates
- Daily Beast: 58,000 Dead, and Depraved DeSantis Is Just Getting Started
- The Hill: GOP leaders escalate battle against COVID-19 vaccine mandates
- Salon: After Republicans push anti-mask policies, Arizona's COVID death rate now as high as New York's
- The Tennessean: Limited emergency power, loosened COVID restrictions: Tennessee House Republicans want it all
- MSNBC: Republican doctors in Congress give 'sketchy' advice on Covid-19

...Reports dropped that mask and vaccine mandates are *still* working!

- USA Today: Biden touts vaccination progress as cases, hospitalizations drop; FDA panel gives thumbs-up to Moderna booster: COVID-19 updates
- Healthline: Vaccinated People May Be Even Less Likely to Transmit COVID-19 Than Previously Thought

- **The Post-Gazette**: Polio shows that vaccines really work
- **US News**: Biden Stands His Ground on Vaccine Requirements: 'Data Shows That They Work'
- **Healthcare Finance News**: Mandates likely work to increase vaccine uptake, report finds
- **USA Today**: New infections drop more than 50% nationwide; FDA panel OKs Pfizer vaccine for kids, who are increasingly infected

In The States

ARIZONA

Monday, October 25 to Thursday, October 28 — Mobile Billboard Outside Sen. Kyrsten Sinema's Office Urging Support for Medicare Negotiations to Lower Drug Prices: A mobile billboard sponsored by Protect Our Care appeared in front of Senator Kyrsten Sinema's office to urge her to do the right thing and support legislation to end the current ban and give Medicare the power to negotiate for lower drug prices for all Americans. The mobile billboard also circled the State Capitol as constituents and advocates continue to sound the alarm of the potential consequences of Congress passing a completely watered-down version of Medicare negotiations in the Build Back Better Act. You can hear the ad from the mobile billboard [here](#).



CALIFORNIA

Tuesday, October 26 — Local Advocates Protest Scott Peters for Opposing Medicare Negotiations to Lower Drug Costs for CA-52 Constituents: Local advocates and constituents of Rep. Scott Peters staged a visibility event at Nobel Drive and I-5 Overpass in Peters' district. The local displeasure with Rep. Peters comes as he continues to stonewall progress in Congress on the entire Build Back Better Plan, including H.R. 3, which would save millions of American lives. Because Medicare is the largest purchaser of drugs in the U.S., Medicare negotiations would effectively lower drug prices for all Americans. Polling shows that 90% of voters in Rep. Peters's district support giving Medicare the power to negotiate for lower drug prices.



CLIPS

- [Florida Politics](#): Poll: Stephanie Murphy constituents support health care provisions in Joe Biden spending plan
- [CBS-8](#): Congressman Scott Peters under fire for vote on prescription drug bill
- [Insider NJ](#): Heading Toward Retirement, Weinberg Fights for Lower Healthcare Costs
- [WMBC News](#): Sen. Weinberg and Advocates Fight for Lower Drug Prices
- [Times of San Diego](#): 14 Local Elected Officials Back Medicare Drug Price Controls in Biden Legislation
- [Delaware News Journal](#): Letters: Prescription drug prices, Jan. 6
- [The Keystone](#): How Build Back Better Could Help These Pennsylvanians Build a Better Life

Local Headlines

Alabama

- Axios: [Alabama Governor Orders State Agencies To Fight Federal Vaccine Mandate](#)

Arizona

- KTAR News: [Obamacare Enrollment In Arizona Expands By 40,000, With More Gains Likely](#)
- Washington Post: [Arizona's Pandemic Outlook Worries Experts As Mask And Vaccine Mandate Battles Rage](#)

California

- AP: [California Virus Cases Stop Falling, Governor Urges Caution](#)
- Los Angeles Times: [California Plans Ambitious Effort To Vaccinate Young Children](#)

Colorado

- AP: [Judge: Colorado Parents Can't Exempt Kids From School Masks](#)

Florida

- AP: [Florida's Top Doctor Refuses Mask, Is Told To Leave Meeting](#)
- AP: [Flouting White House, Florida Penalizes School Districts](#)
- Politico: ['Tossing People Aside:' DeSantis Escalates Clash With Biden Over Vaccines](#)
- The Hill: [DeSantis Eyes \\$5,000 Bonus For Unvaccinated Police To Relocate To Florida](#)

Georgia

- Insurance News Net: [Ossoff, Warnock Continue Push For Georgia Medicaid Expansion](#)

Iowa

- AP: [Iowa Lawmakers Pass Vaccine Mandate Exemption Bill](#)

Kentucky

- AP: [Beshar: Federal Covid-19 Funeral Assistance Available](#)

Louisiana

- AP: [Louisiana Governor To Announce If He'll Lift Mask Mandate](#)
- New Orleans Times-Picayune: [New Orleans To Lift Mask Mandate, Tweak Covid Vaccine Rules Ahead Of Halloween](#)

Maine

- KHN: [In Maine, Vaccine Mandate For EMTs Stresses Small-Town Ambulance Crews](#)

Massachusetts

- Washington Post: [Daily Testing In Schools Faces A Rocky Rollout In Massachusetts](#)

Michigan

- Detroit Free Press: [Michigan's Covid-19 Delta Variant Surge Might Be On Its Way Out, Experts Say](#)

Nevada

- Las Vegas Review Journal: [House Passes Bill To Get Mental Health Support For First Responders](#)

New York

- Gothamist: [FDNY: 1 in 5 Ambulances, Fire Companies Could Be Offline Monday As NYC Workers Fight Vaccine Mandate](#)
- NBC News: [Trash Piles Up As Vaccination Deadline Looms For NYC Workers](#)
- Wall Street Journal: [New York City Inches Toward Covid-19 Becoming Endemic](#)

North Carolina

- The News & Observer: [What's The Best Incentive For A Covid--19 Vaccine? Here's What This Study Says](#)

Tennessee

- AP: [Tennessee GOP Lawmakers Sprint In Bid To Curb Covid Rules](#)

Utah

- The Salt Lake Tribune: [More Than 200 Utahns Have Died Of Covid-19 In October Alone](#)

Washington

- AP: [Federal Judge Rejects Bid To Stop Washington Vaccine Mandate](#)
- AP: [Inslee: 94% Of State Employees Comply With Vaccine Mandate](#)

Wisconsin

- Wisconsin Examiner: [Republicans Vote Against Medicaid For Transgender Patient Care](#)