



Congress Continues ‘*Much Ado About Nothing*’ on Reducing Prescription Drug Prices Talk Is Cheap – Drugs Are Not

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If William Shakespeare were alive today his play, *Much Ado About Nothing*, could be about Congress constantly wrangling over the need to reduce prescription drugs prices but never enacting legislation to accomplish it.

Meanwhile, the National Retiree Legislative Network (NRLN) sees Americans, especially the 65 million Americans on Medicare, being caught in the terrible perfect storm of prescription drug price gouging. Seniors are taking more expensive medications while living on fixed incomes. Even with their Medicare Part D prescription drug plan they are paying substantial out-of-pocket costs.

The pharmaceutical industry began January 2022 as it has in other years by raising prices on prescription drugs. Drug manufacturers raised wholesale prices by a median of 4.9% on more than 450 prescription medicines. Additional price increases are expected later in 2022.

According to a Rand Corporation study published on January 29, 2021, the U.S. prices for brand-name drugs are 3.44 times more than those in the other countries.

To reduce drugs prices, the NRLN supports **H.R.3, Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act**.

The House has not had a vote on the bill. In stead three elements of the bill are in **H.R.5376, Build Back Better Act**, the centerpiece of President Joe Biden’s domestic legislative agenda. H.R.5376 would allow Medicare to:

- Negotiate directly with pharmaceutical manufacturers to lower prices for as many as 10 expensive drugs, starting in 2025 and increasing to 20 drugs.
- Limit to \$2,000 a year the out-of-pocket amount paid by Medicare participants.
- People on Medicare, insulin would cost no more than \$35 a month.

The bill’s final shape, which was passed by the House, is far more modest than earlier versions, which would have allowed negotiations on the price of up to 250 drugs.

H.R.5376, Build Back Better Act has not been voted on in the Senate due to its cost of \$1.75 trillion.

Regardless of what happens with the Build Back Better Act, the NRLN will continue to base its lobbying to reduce prescription drug prices on:

1. Remove the prohibition on Medicare negotiating prescription drug prices. It should replace it with a competitive bidding mandate to be applied wherever two or more FDA approved generic drugs, or two or more brand drugs, or a generic and brand drugs (upon patent expiration) treat the same medical condition.
2. End pay-for-delay and other tactics that keep generic drugs off the market.
3. Allow individuals to import prescription drugs manufactured at FDA-inspected facilities from licensed Canadian sellers and import drugs from other countries that meet FDA safety standards.

Rx bills the NRLN supports in the 117th Congress are listed in the NRLN’s white paper.