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Majority Leader Schumer Floor Remarks On Senate Democrats' Continued Focus On Lowering Costs For American Families

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Washington, D.C. – Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) today spoke on the Senate floor on the steps that Senate Democrats are taking to address the rising cost of prescription drugs, to hold oil and gas companies accountable, and to alleviate bottlenecks in the supply chain. Below are Senator Schumer's remarks, which can also be viewed here:

This morning, I want to highlight two steps Senate Democrats are taking to maintain our laser focus on lowering costs for American families.

First, today the Senate Finance Committee is holding a hearing examining one of the most vexing issues facing Americans everywhere: the alarming rise in prescription drug costs.

Few things are as frustrating and debilitating as going to the pharmacy and seeing the price on your receipt go up and up and up for essential medications.

For families struggling to make ends meet, drug costs present a harrowing Sophie's choice: do I buy groceries and diapers and take care of my kids or do I pay for my medications?

It's a decision no American should make, but millions have to make it every day.

Insulin is a particularly flummoxing example: according to some sources a 40-day supply can now climb north of \$600 a month. For millions of Americans who rely on insulin to manage their diabetes, this is a crisis that should compel the Senate to act. I expect that we will consider next steps soon on proposals already presented to my colleagues.

And besides rising prescription drug costs, Senate Democrats are zeroing in on the alarming state of energy prices.

In the coming weeks, I expect that Congress will be calling on CEOs from the oil and gas companies to testify on the alarming spike in energy prices.

Over the past few weeks—as war in Ukraine began—the price of a barrel of oil rose precipitously. That immediately translated to oil and gas companies raising the price for Americans at the pump.

But something is happening that Americans shouldn't overlook: over the past few days, oil prices have actually been decreasing, but the price of gas at the pump has not.

Some of the economists call this stickiness, when the costs go up, the price to the consumer goes up. When the costs go down, the price to the consumer stays high. Stickiness does not come close to describing the outrage that Americans feel about this.

The last time that the price of a barrel of oil was at \$96, gas was \$3.62 a gallon. = oil prices have now come down to \$96 again, and yet the price of gas continue to rise. It is now at \$4.31.

The bewildering incongruity between falling oil prices and rising gas prices smacks of price gouging and is deeply damaging to working Americans. The Senate is going to get answers, and that's why we will be calling on the CEOs of major oil companies to come testify before the Congress.

Meanwhile, as Americans pay more at the pump, the biggest oil companies in America are making a killing. Twenty five of the top oil and gas companies reported a combined \$205 billion in profits [in 2021]. That is an astounding figure, blowing pre-pandemic figures out of the water.

But instead of lowing gas prices, oil companies are using these soaring profits to reward their shareholders through stock buybacks. It is outrageous to me. Stock buybacks, they benefit the CEOs because they can tell the shareholders, see the price went up. But it's not

because they sold more product, became more efficient, hired more workers, used productivity. It's simply decreasing the number of shares so the price goes up. That to me is so wrong. It's one of the disturbing signs of American capitalism.

These disturbing trends demand answers, and the CEOs of large oil and gas companies should be advised that they will have to provide answers before the Senate very soon. Why stock buybacks? Instead of lowering prices, or increasing productivity, or moving to green energy, which we know we all have to do.

And finally, in conclusion, another issue on prices the Senate will also take action on the bottlenecks and supply chain crisis crippling our shipping lines. Senator Cantwell and the Commerce Committee will be holding a markup on March 22nd on bipartisan legislation introduced by Senators Klobuchar and Thune that will target this issue. One of many, many ways that Democrats are continuing our focus on lowering costs for American families.

So, these are some concrete steps that we're taking. You're going to hear about many more as Democrats focus keenly, laser-like on the higher costs for the American people, which we know must, must come down.

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