Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Health
"Lowering the Cost of Prescription Drugs: Reducing Barriers to Market Competition"
March 13, 2019
As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Madam Chair, for hosting today's hearing – the first regarding the issue of drug pricing under the new majority.

Last Congress, as chairman of this committee, it was a priority of mine to make sure that patients could get streamlined access to more affordable prescription drugs. Working together in a bipartisan manner, this committee advanced the Food and Drug Administration Reauthorization Act – or FDARA – to the full House by a unanimous vote of 54-0. The bill then went on to pass the House of Representatives by voice vote before being signed into law by President Trump.

This law helps incentivize the entrance of competitive generic drugs where there was a lack of competition in the marketplace, resulting in an ability to decrease costs to consumers. As a result, we've already seen generic drugs come to the market through these new pathways, and prices begin to drop for consumers on a variety of medications.

In fact, according to the FDA, roughly 1,275 approvals and approximately 320 tentative approvals for generic drugs have occurred since passage of this law. This includes the approval of the first ever generic EpiPen. Even more, five competitive generic therapies approvals have taken place thanks to the new pathway granted to the FDA by this committee.

This bipartisan law has lowered the costs of important medications and devices, sped up how medical innovations come to fruition, and is a win for our health care workforce.

These real results are the result of our bipartisan, cooperative approach.

And we didn't stop there…

We then turned our attention to the complete drug supply chain. We put together arguably the most well attended bipartisan member briefing of my tenure as chairman. For that briefing we brought in an academic expert in drug pricing to better educate our committee on this

multifaceted problem and creative solutions to drive down the cost of prescription drugs.

Following that, we brought 10 witnesses into a bipartisan hearing in this very room where we dug into all aspects of the drug supply chain, including manufacturing, wholesale and distribution, and payment for drugs – and how each of these stages impact the cost of medications.

Last Congress, our committee made real progress in getting lower-cost generics to the market, incentivizing and adding competition where it previously didn't exist, and examining the drug supply chain – all because we worked together towards a common goal.

Regrettably, while Republicans share the goal of the today's hearing – lowering the cost of prescription drugs – the process has been anything but inclusive.

Today, we're considering seven bills, but only three have Republican cosponsors. That's largely because we didn't even get a list of these bills until just eight days ago. And then, we were given just 24 hours to help identify potential Republican cosponsors.

By my count, this subcommittee has reviewed 14 bills this Congress. Just four have Republican co-authors. That's a disturbing trend.

Equally concerning, the bills we are examining today each represent complex modifications to the Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act and the FDA is not even serving as a witness. A legislative hearing is the only public opportunity to hear from experts on the policies being advanced, and we will not have the agency responsible for implementing such technical policies present.

Madam Chair, is there a reason we're not hearing from the FDA experts? Can you commit that this subcommittee will have an opportunity to get the agency's expert advice and counsel before members are required to vote on these bills?

I know you care deeply about getting public policy right, and we stand ready to work with on these important matters. American consumers need our help to get medical costs down and consumer choice up.