

Remarks on Signing an Executive Order To Reduce Prescription Drug Shortages and an Exchange With Reporters

October 31, 2011

The President. Well, thank you all for being here.

The United States, I think rightly, takes pride on having the most innovative and most successful drug industry in the world, and as a consequence the health of a lot of people, both here in the United States and around the world, is actively promoted. But as we also know, occasionally there are problems in our manufacture and distribution of drugs and how accessible they are to people.

And recently, we have seen how the potential of drug shortages for vital drugs, including some cancers, can really have a adverse impact on patients and those who are caring for patients. Sometimes we run out of or run low on certain types of drugs, and that drives up prices and it increases patient risk.

And I've got a couple of people here beside me who have had to navigate this problem. Jay Cuetara knows what it's like. In August, the center where he was receiving chemotherapy ran out of the drug being used to treat his cancer. And when that happens, you have pharmacy managers like Bonnie Frawley who have to scramble to make sure that their patients can somehow find the life-saving medications that are necessary.

So over the last 5 years, the number of these drug shortages has nearly tripled. And even though the FDA has successfully prevented an actual crisis, this is one of those slow-rolling problems that could end up resulting in disaster for patients and health care facilities all across the country.

Congress has been trying since February to do something about this. It has not yet been able to get it done. And it is the belief of this administration, as well as folks like Bonnie and Jay, that we can't wait for action on the Hill, we've got to go ahead and move forward.

So as a consequence, I'm going to be signing an Executive order today that directs the FDA to step up work to reduce the drug shortages and protect consumers. We'll still be calling on Congress to pass a bipartisan bill that will provide additional tools to the FDA and others that can make a difference. But until they act, we will go ahead and move.

As part of this, we're going to require that drug companies let us know earlier about the potential for drug shortages so that we can respond successfully. We're going to make sure that if we find out that prices are being driven up because shortages are being made worse by manipulations of companies or distributors, that we are making sure that we stop those practices. We're going to further empower the FDA and the Department of Justice to investigate any kinds of abuses that would lead to drug shortages.

So there's a combination of tools that are going to be contained in this Executive order that can make sure that life-saving drugs are available, and if we start seeing shortages, that we're able to catch those ahead of time so that Bonnie doesn't have to try to scramble as a pharmacy manager, and Jay, obviously, doesn't have to scramble as a patient.

This is something that needs to be done. I want to thank the leadership of both our FDA administrator and our Health and Human Services Secretary for having done outstanding work

in preparing this Executive order. And again, I still urge Congress to move forward and build on this Executive order so that we can provide even more tools for our agencies. And I want to thank Bonnie and Jay for being here and for helping inspire us to get this done.

All right. With that I'm going to sign this bill—or this Executive order—excuse me.

[At this point, the President signed the Executive order.]

The President. There you go. Thank you very much, everybody. Appreciate it.

Meeting With Quartet Representative to the Middle East Tony Blair

Q. Tony Blair—can you tell us anything about the meeting with Tony Blair this morning?

The President. I enjoyed our meeting with Tony Blair.

Thank you. Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:50 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Margaret A. Hamburg, Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Prescription drug shortages, signing an Executive order reducing; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

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