

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
“Promoting the Development of Antibiotics and Ensuring Judicious Use in Humans”
Subcommittee on Health
June 9, 2010

Thank you for holding this second in a series of hearings on antibiotic resistance – a growing and dangerous threat to the public health. It is an issue that deserves the full and complete attention of this Committee.

At our inaugural hearing, we learned about the impact of antibiotic resistance on human health. Today, we will continue that discussion, focusing on two important and directly related issues: the preservation of effective medicines that already make up our antibiotic drug arsenal and the development of new antibiotics to fight resistant bugs.

I understand that our next hearing on this topic will examine antibiotic use in animal agriculture, an area of great interest to many Committee members.

But today, we want to concentrate on the human dimension of antibiotics and the importance of ensuring that, both here in the U.S. and around the globe, people keep on benefiting from these life-saving treatments.

By definition, this is an inherently difficult goal to achieve – after all, the very use of antibiotics leads to the development of pathogens that can no longer be treated by those antibiotics. In this case, rather than “use it or lose it,” with antibiotics it is “use it and lose it.”

And “lose it,” we are. As was reported at our first hearing, for a variety of reasons, we are at great risk of backtracking on much of the progress that has been made in fighting infection and subsequent disease. Already untold numbers of Americans die or are infected each year by antibiotic resistant microbes. We pay a high price in other ways as well: additional hospital stays; hospital re-admissions; and increased doctor visits. These all add – unnecessarily – to the nation’s annual health care bill.

Our hearing in May made clear that it will take a multi-pronged approach to overcome this very serious and very present problem. Today, we will focus on two such strategies: a reduction in the inappropriate use of antibiotics and an expansion of the antibiotic product line and market.

I believe we must pursue both lines of attack. We simply must find ways to cut back on both the overuse and misuse of these drugs. Patients cannot expect to get antibiotics every time they come down with a cold and physicians should only prescribe them when they are truly necessary.

At the same time, we need to ensure the existence of a market environment that encourages the development and commercialization of new safe and effective antibiotics to treat those pathogens resistant to existing antibiotics. Such an environment does not appear to be in place today.

As we consider possibilities for market incentives, we must not lose sight of the potential impact those incentives may have on patients – new antibiotics are worthless if people cannot afford to buy them.

The written testimony we have already received lays out a variety of approaches to meet these twin objectives, and I look forward to hearing more about them from our witnesses today. As we do, I hope we can continue to work, on a bipartisan basis, towards a public-private plan of action to address the overall and pressing antibiotic resistance problem that we now face.

I thank the witnesses for their testimony and look forward to hearing from them.