

Sen. Susan M. Collins
Bangor Rotary
Sept. 3, 2019

Thank you, Sarah. I am delighted to be back home with so many good friends and proud to be an honorary member of this great club.

This afternoon, I'd like to begin with what we're doing in Washington to build a new economy for the future and Maine's role in that effort. Let me start with advanced manufacturing and renewable energy.

I know many of you took part in a field trip to the Advanced Structures and Composites Center at UMaine. Well, my first official visit as a new Senator in 1997 was to the Center in its infancy. The innovative work by Dr. Habib Dagher and his team was so impressive that I made a commitment to do all I could to support this vital research. Over the years, I have secured more than \$65 million in federal support for the composites lab, providing opportunities for more than 2,300 students to intern in the lab.

Recently, I visited Compotech, a spin-off from the Composites Center founded by UMaine engineers that is designing and manufacturing composite structures. It's in Brewer, and its President Paul Melrose is so happy to be back in Maine.

A Hawaii-based company, Navatech, is also expanding in Maine and rapidly hiring engineers to design fast watercraft for the Navy, using technology developed at UMaine. And soon, the University will have the largest 3-D printer in the country!

A world-class consortium led by the Center is pioneering a new era of energy independence by harnessing powerful deepwater offshore winds through the Aqua Ventus Project. In addition to generating electricity through clean, renewable sources, this work has the potential to create thousands of good-paying jobs in Maine.

The project won \$40 million from the Department of Energy to support phase three, which will deploy deepwater floating turbines off Maine's coast. I have worked with Dr. Dagher to advance this project for more than a decade.

Now, if you use anything from a smartphone to an electric car, you know that it's all about the battery. We can produce vast amounts of energy from wind, waves, and the sun. Storing that energy for when it is needed and being able to feed it into our nation's electric grid reliably and efficiently is the next great frontier. Advanced batteries and other new technologies are the answer.

That is why I have sponsored the *Better Energy Storage Technology* – or BEST -- Act with Senator Heinrich of New Mexico. This legislation will support grid-scale energy storage research and development. Our bill would provide federal investments of \$60 million annually for the next five years to help catalyze the development of this

technology that holds such great promise in the fight against climate change by supporting clean energy generation and its efficient storage.

The last time I spoke here, I discussed the bipartisan support for biomedical research that is leading to breakthroughs in our fight against devastating diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Biomedical research is improving lives, even saving lives, in our country and around the world. Over the last four years, Congress has increased funding by 30 percent – or \$9 billion -- for the nation’s premier biomedical research arm, the National Institutes of Health. There is simply no investment that promises greater returns for America.

Even for such intractable illnesses as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and MS, I am encouraged by my conversations with scientists and physicians across the country. From our universities and hospitals, such as Acadia here in Bangor where clinical trials on Alzheimer’s are underway, to the research at MDI Biological and Jackson Laboratories, Maine plays a key role in this vital work.

There is another aspect of these investments that is often overlooked. Biomedical research also has a significant economic impact right here in Maine. Last year alone, 13 institutions in our state, including the Jackson Laboratory, Maine Medical Center, the University of Maine, and the University of New England, received a total of 160 NIH grants totaling nearly \$100 million. 2017 data suggest that the multiplier effect of this research for that year included an additional \$200 million in sales by Maine businesses and \$24 million in revenue for state, county, and local governments.

These federal investments supported more than 1,500 good jobs in our State. The scientific research and development sector in Maine has also seen higher job growth for employees under age 25 since 2014 compared to other sectors, and average pay is one-and-a-half times higher - \$57,000 versus \$38,500. The advanced level of biomedical research that is occurring in our State is a largely untold story and something that should make all Mainers proud.

Let me now turn to another health issue that that we must continue to address: the rising cost of prescription drugs.

Since 2015, I have held eight hearings on drug pricing as Chairman of the Aging Committee. I have heard so many heartbreaking stories from people who are struggling to afford the medication that they need. A young father from New Gloucester whose 13-year-old son has Type I diabetes found that the cost of a 90-day supply of insulin had tripled to more than \$900. He had to resort to paying out-of-pocket for much lower-cost insulin from Canada, without any credit toward his insurance deductible.

At our hearing on prescription drugs for rheumatoid arthritis, a woman from Falmouth testified that her out-of-pocket costs soared from \$10 to \$3,800 per month for Enbrel when she transitioned from employer-sponsored insurance to Medicare. She couldn’t afford this expense and had to switch to a different drug, which is not self-

administered. This switch required her to go to a doctor's office once a month for a two-and-a-half-hour infusion, and it did not work as well for her.

And I will never forget standing in line at the pharmacy counter here in Bangor and inadvertently overhearing the couple ahead of me. The pharmacist gave them the unwelcome news that their copay was going to be \$111. The husband turned to his wife and said, "Honey, we simply cannot afford this," and they walked away, leaving that needed prescription on the counter. I asked the pharmacist, "How often does this happen?" and he told me the terrible answer: every single day.

Just like these Mainers, millions of other Americans are finding it extremely difficult to afford the exorbitant cost of medication they need to maintain their health or the health of their loved ones. Their stories are motivating Congress to act on a bipartisan, bicameral basis.

Last Congress, I authored a bipartisan law to prohibit "gag clauses" that prevented pharmacists from volunteering to their patients information about less expensive ways to purchase their prescription drugs. In some cases, paying with your debit card is less costly than using your insurance. According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, banning these gag clauses could help Americans save money in nearly one out of four prescription transactions at the pharmacy counter.

The Senate Health Committee, on which I serve, also has approved the *Lower Health Care Costs Act*, which seeks to reduce what Americans pay out of their pockets for health care. The package includes more than 14 measures to increase drug price competition, including major portions of bipartisan legislation I authored to help prevent drug manufacturers from gaming the patent system to block a lower-cost competitor drug from being available to patients.

Nowhere is the opaque nature of our prescription drug system more confusing and harmful than in the soaring cost of insulin. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, Medicare Part D spending on insulin increased 840 percent between 2007 and 2017 due to the rising cost of insulin and an increase in the number of insulin-dependent people with diabetes. The Health Care Cost Institute found that the price of an insulin prescription rose from \$344 in 2012 to \$666 by 2016.

Although insulin was discovered in 1921, nearly a century ago, the cost of this lifesaving medication has increased exponentially. I have heard from people across the country who have had to ration or skip doses altogether to make their insulin supply last longer. Some have sought medication online from other countries. These drastic measures can result in major risks that can compromise health and even life.

In order to combat these skyrocketing costs, I introduced the *Insulin Price Reduction Act* with Senator Shaheen of New Hampshire. Our bipartisan bill would hold pharmacy benefit managers, pharmaceutical companies, and insurers accountable for these surging prices by incentivizing reductions in list prices. For the most popular

insulins, our reforms could result in more than a 75 percent decrease in prices compared to what we can otherwise expect to see in 2020.

The topics I have discussed today – clean energy, advanced manufacturing, life-changing medical research, and affordable medications – are joined in a common theme. Progress in Washington results when there is bipartisanship. I continue to believe that, despite our differences, we all desire an America that is vibrant, just, and prosperous. Thank you, and I'm happy to take your questions.

###