

## Politics

## Plan unveiled

## Clinton takes on Big Pharma

WASHINGTON, Sept 23, (AFP): Democratic presidential frontrunner **Hillary Clinton** unveiled a plan Tuesday to limit prescription medicine costs, challenging the US pharmaceutical industry after the price for one drug skyrocketed by 5,000 percent.

The United States has no government-led universal health care program for all its nationals. At least 33 million Americans have no health insurance whatsoever, government data show.

Clinton's plan would allow for Medicare, the national health insurance program set up specifically for people over 65, "to negotiate for lower prices for its members," a move she said would save some \$100 billion per year.

The problem of rising drug prices affects millions of Americans. The majority are covered by private insurance plans offered by employers for workers and their dependents.

And even with overall US health care costs trending slightly lower, prescription drug costs for consumers have shot up — by more than 12 percent last year, according to Clinton.

Even senior citizens with Medicare often pay part of their medical expenses.

So the issue is one that resonates with many voters. Many aged Americans go bankrupt paying for their medical care, and cut pills in half to make prescriptions last longer, while the uninsured in their millions usually get little care until they have to head to an emergency room.

## Race

The health care costs issue has been simmering in the early months of the 2016 presidential race.

But it catapulted into the national spotlight on Monday, when Clinton reacted to a company that raised by 50-fold the price of a drug used by AIDS and cancer patients and others with compromised immune systems — a price the company now says it will lower.

Clinton's outrage over prescription drug "price-gouging," and her vow to "lay out a plan to take it on," sent pharmaceutical and biotechnology stocks into a four-percent slide Monday.

In Iowa the next day, she announced her plan that would cap out-of-pocket drug costs for working families at \$250 per month for covered medications.

It would require pharmaceutical companies to spend a certain portion of their revenue on research and development, and would aim to cut down on direct-to-consumer advertising by companies that receive substantial federal tax breaks.

"I want to both protect consumers and promote innovation, while putting an end to profiteering," she said.

She also vowed to end the ban on US consumers purchasing US-made drugs from countries that sell them for less than in the United States.

"If the medicine you need costs less in Canada you should be able to buy it from Canada, or any other country that meets our safety standards," she said.

## Scale

The United States' neighbor to the north has national health insurance for all, and the huge scope of "economies of scale" usually lowers costs, including for medications.

Clinton also returned to the issue of the company of the moment, Turing Pharmaceuticals, which in August purchased the rights to a 60-year-old drug, Daraprim, and soon afterward raised its price 50-fold, from \$13.50 per pill to \$750.

"That's price-gouging, pure and simple," Clinton said, without mentioning the company by name.

Turing's chief executive, Martin Shkreli, told NBC news Tuesday that the company would lower the price of Daraprim, but did not say what the new price would be.

"There were mistakes made with respect to helping people understand why we took this action. I think that it makes sense to lower the price in response to the anger that was felt by people," Shkreli said.

Daraprim fights toxoplasmosis, one of the most common food-borne diseases. It often infects people with immune systems that have been weakened by HIV and AIDS, or from chemotherapy.

Shkreli previously defended the price hike, saying his firm was turning it into a profit-maker that would spur more research and innovation.



Clinton



US President Barack Obama welcomes Pope Francis to the White House on Sept 23, in Washington, DC. President Barack Obama hosts Pope Francis at the White House for the first time Wednesday, warmly embracing the Catholic pontiff seen as both a moral authority and potent political ally. (AFP)

## Diplomacy

## Pope Francis jumps into the issue

## 'Climate change action can't wait'

Chinese president seeks to reassure on trade, security

## Xi urges less suspicion in US-China ties

WASHINGTON, Sept 23, (AP): Jumping into the issues of the day, Pope Francis opened his visit to the United States with a strong call Wednesday for action to combat climate change, calling it a problem that "can no longer be left to a future generation." President Barack Obama, in turn, hailed the pontiff as a moral force who is "shaking us out of our complacency" with reminders to care for the poor and the planet.

The White House mustered all the pageantry it had to offer as the pope arrived at the White House before an adoring crowd of thousands and a nation that seemingly cannot get enough of the humble pontiff who is rejuvenating American Catholicism while giving heartburn to some of its conservatives.

Speaking in a soft voice and halting English, Francis delivered a strong message against those who doubt the science of climate change, saying that the warming planet "demands on our part a serious and responsible recognition" of conditions awaiting today's children.

It was a message sure to delight the Obama White House, and liberals in general. But the pope's message had something for conservatives, too, with a pointed call to protect religious liberties — "one of America's most precious possessions."

"All are called to be vigilant," he said, "to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it."

That message was sure to be welcomed by many US bishops and conservatives who have objected to the Obama administration's health care mandate and the recent Supreme Court legalization of same-sex marriage.

## Attention

With flags snapping, color guard at attention and a military band's brassy marches, Francis stepped from his modest Fiat onto the South Lawn on a crisp fall morning that felt as optimistic as his own persona. Pope and president stood on a red-carpeted platform bedecked with red, white and blue bunting, standing at attention for the national anthems of the Holy See and the United States.

Just before the pope arrived, Obama had tweeted to the Holy Father: "Welcome to the White House. @Pontifex! Your messages of love, hope, and peace have inspired us all."

Obama, joking that his backyard is not typically so crowded, told the pope that the excitement surrounding his visit was a reflection of Francis' unique qualities, mentioning "your humility, your embrace of simplicity, the gentleness of your words and the generosity of your spirit."

The president singled out the pope's call for focusing on the poor and the

SEATTLE, Sept 23, (AFP): China's president on Tuesday called for less "suspicion" in ties between the world's top two economies, ahead of landmark talks later this week with US President Barack Obama.

Xi Jinping's comments, at a keynote speech in the commercial hub of Seattle, came as US aerospace giant Boeing reportedly clinched a deal with Chinese firms to sell 300 aircraft.

"We want to see more understanding and trust and less estrangement and suspicion," said Xi, whose country has seen somewhat strained ties with the United States on several issues.

"Conflict and confrontation" between the two powers "would lead to disaster for both countries and the world at large," stressed Xi.

Ahead of talks with the Obama administration later this week on hot-button issues like China's expanding presence in the South China Sea, cyber theft and human rights, Xi sought to convince an audience of mostly businessmen and US state officials that China was a positive force in the global economy and was pushing forward with reforms based on rule of law and market principles.

China's foreign policy priority was to build what he described as a "new model" of relationship with Washington based on "non-confrontation, non-conflict, mutual

respect and willing cooperation," said the president.

"We must read each other's strategic intentions correctly."

Xi vowed to treat US investors in China fairly and fight against commercial cyber theft, a growing complaint against China by American businesses.

"We respect the international business norms of non-discrimination," he told an audience that included the chief executives of some of the largest US businesses, including Boeing, Amazon, DuPont, IBM and Microsoft, all of whom have substantial business in China.

"We will address legitimate concerns of foreign investors in a timely fashion."

On the hacking issue, he said China itself is a victim and was ready to set up a "high-level" mechanism with the United States to discuss the problem.

"The Chinese government will not in whatever form engage in commercial theft or encourage or support such attempts by anyone." At the same time, he suggested that US threats to sanction Chinese officials over the alleged hacking were out of line, saying cyber theft was a crime that had to be prosecuted "in accordance with law."

He also stressed that China's economic downturn was temporary and that the government was on

top of recent market turmoil.

"At present all economies are facing difficulties and our economy is also under general pressure," Xi said.

"China's stock market has reached the phase of self-recovery and self-adjustment," he said.

Xi is spending two days in Seattle meeting with the governors of US states with substantial trade and investment ties to China, and the businesses themselves, sending a message to the White House that US companies need China.

Xi's meetings with Obama and US business leaders offer the chance to bolster the president's stature at home, building on a high-profile military parade earlier this month to mark the end of World War Two, while deflecting attention from China's recent stock market rout, slowing economy and a chemical explosion at a Tianjin warehouse that killed more than 160 people.

Xi said the Chinese people supported his anti-corruption campaign, which has touched every level of the government, Communist Party and military. The crackdown would continue and was not a product of factional struggles, he said.

"There is no power struggle in this. There is no House of Cards," Xi said, drawing laughter from the audience with his reference to the popular US political drama.

about the comings and goings of world figures. Washington was the first stop on the pope's six-day, three-city visit to the United States.

People of all faiths wanted to be a part of it, from the hundreds on hand for his arrival at Andrews Air Force Base late Tuesday to the spectators outside the Vatican's diplomatic mission where the pope was staying to the throngs at the White House and the streets outside.

## Security

Kimberly Johnson, a 27-year-old medical student who lives in Washington, said she arrived outside the security gates at midnight in order to be the first one let into the sectioned-off viewing area that opened at 4 am.

"It's not just that he's the pope. He's a cool pope," Johnson said. "He's bringing the Catholic Church into the 21st century and making it a more accessible faith."

The pope took his time getting to the

White House, stopping to greet schoolchildren who had gathered outside the Vatican's nunciature. The children took selfies with the pope, hugged him and waved Holy See flags. Thousands more were gathering for a morning parade on streets near the White House.

For all of the oh-wow enthusiasm attending the visit, the pope and the president, with overlapping but far-from-identical agendas, had serious matters to attend to.

Obama was anxious to add oomph to his own efforts to combat climate change and fight income inequality, among other things, by finding common cause with the pope. But the two differ sharply on other issues, such as abortion and same-sex marriage.

From Francis' vantage point, his next stop after the White House was just as critical. The 78-year-old pontiff was meeting with America's 450-strong bishops' conference at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle.



Chinese President Xi Jinping speaks during his welcoming banquet at the start of his visit to the United States, at the Westin Hotel in Seattle, Washington on Sept 22. President Xi will make a high-profile state visit to the White House this week, but he stops first in Washington state on the west coast to shore up support among skittish allies, especially big business. The Seattle talks will be heavily focused on business, trade and economics. (AFP)

## America

**Craft in 'unsafe maneuver':** A Chinese aircraft performed an unsafe maneuver during an air intercept of a US spy plane last week, a Pentagon spokesman said on Tuesday, an incident revealed just as Chinese President Xi Jinping kicks off a week-long US visit.

The intercept occurred on Sept 15, about 80 miles (130 km) east of the Shandong peninsula in the Yellow Sea and involved an American RC-135 reconnaissance plane, said Peter Cook, the Pentagon spokesman.

"The pilot reported that he felt... the aircraft passed in front of his nose in an unsafe fashion," Cook said, referring to the Chinese aircraft.

"There's no indication this was a near collision." The Department of Defense is reviewing the report of the incident, Cook said.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman **Hong Lei** said he did not know anything about the incident but China was committed to maritime and aviation safety.

"China has consistently dedicated itself to maintaining maritime and air safety in accordance with international laws and norms, and to establishing mutual military trust with other countries to appropriately manage differences," he told reporters.

China's Defense Ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

Cook said last week's intercept was not similar to an incident in August 2014, when a Chinese warplane flew as close as 20 to 30 feet (7 to 10 meters) to a US Navy patrol jet and conducted a barrel roll over the plane. (RTRS)

**Allen to step down:** The US special envoy for countering the Islamic State militant group, retired General **John Allen**, plans to step down for personal reasons, a US official said on Tuesday.

Allen, a retired US Marine four star general and a former commander of NATO and US Forces in Afghanistan, had originally agreed to serve in the job for six months and has done it for a year, said the official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

While acknowledging disagreements within Washington over US policy toward the militant group, which has seized control of parts of Iraq and Syria, the US official said Allen's plan to step down reflected personal, not professional, factors.

The Syrian civil war has raged for more than four years, creating a vacuum in Syria that the Islamic State militant group has exploited to seize territory there and in neighboring Iraq. (RTRS)

**Plea talks take place:** A suburban Chicago youth accused of trying to join Islamic State militants is holding talks about a possible plea deal.

Agents arrested 19-year-old Mohammed Hamzah Khan last year as he tried to board a flight with his younger brother and sister to

the Middle East. Khan has denied attempting to provide material support to terrorists. His siblings aren't charged.

Prosecutor Richard Hiller told a status hearing in Chicago federal court Tuesday that the government recently handed a draft agreement to Khan's lawyers. Defense attorney Thomas Durkin says he's "troubled" by some of its conditions but will keep talking with prosecutors. Neither side elaborated.

Judge John Tharp told attorneys he'll set a trial date if a deal isn't sealed by the next sta-



Lei



Allen

tus hearing on Oct 1. (AP)

**'Release Sudanese funds':** A New York federal appeals court says banks holding frozen Sudanese accounts must release assets to satisfy a \$314 million judgment stemming from injuries to sailors in the USS Cole bombing.

The 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals ruled Wednesday. A decision written by Circuit Judge Denny Chin rejected argu-

ments that Sudanese officials were not properly alerted to the plaintiffs' claims and that the assets of Sudan should never have been allowed to satisfy the judgment.

Seventeen US Navy sailors were killed in the Oct 12, 2000, attack on the USS Cole. At the time, the ship was docked in Yemen. Fifteen injured sailors and three spouses sued in 2010, blaming al-Qaeda and Sudan.

In 2012, the US District Court for the District of Columbia entered the default judgment. (AP)