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Bush in Bed with Big Pharma Canada To Ban on US Drug Importation

Some Canadian and U.S. critics have accused the Bush administration of pressuring Canada to restrict sales in the United States.

I think this is a case of Bush in Bed with Big Pharma. It's the Government vs the American People. – Frank D Wiewel, Founder, People Against Cancer.

"I think this is a case of the pharmaceutical companies manipulating markets," said Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.), a co-sponsor of one of the bills before the U.S. Congress to remove the federal prohibition on cross-border drug sales.

"We don't have these kinds of restrictions on any other kind of trade -- cars, tires, anything," she added from Washington. *"It's ludicrous that the American public should pay the highest prices."*

Canada to Restrict Exports to U.S. of Prescription Drugs

Bulk Prescription Sales Would Be Banned

By Doug Struck
Washington Post Foreign Service
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OTTAWA, June 29 -- Canada will take steps to restrict the flow of cheaper prescription drugs to American consumers, the health minister announced Wednesday, countering a move in the U.S. Congress to legalize the import of Canadian drugs.

"Canada cannot be the drugstore for the United States of America. Two hundred eighty million people can't expect us to supply drugs to them," Health Minister Ujjal Dosanjh said at a news conference here.

Dosanjh said he was preparing legislation that would "make sure that bulk exports are not undertaken" to the United States. The measure would stop the plans of a variety of U.S. municipalities and states to reduce drug costs by tapping the Canadian market. Those plans are awaiting the approval of legislation in Congress.

The minister also said he was drafting regulations aimed at controlling individual purchases of Canadian prescription drugs over the Internet, as made by about 2 million Americans last year. He said Canada would toughen its rules to require "an established doctor/patient relationship for any cross-border drug sales."



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Currently, patients who receive a prescription from a U.S. doctor can have it filled over the Internet, with the prescription endorsed by a Canadian doctor and the drugs mailed from Canada directly to the patient.

Dosanjh has long been a critic of this system and said tougher regulations were needed to stop the "unethical" rewriting of prescriptions by Canadian-licensed doctors.

If the new rules require a Canadian doctor to physically examine a patient, they would likely kill the Internet trade. But if they require only that the doctor consult by phone with the patient or view the results of a patient's examination by a U.S. physician, the drug sales could continue, said Andy Troszok, president of the Canadian International Pharmacy Association.

"We want the opportunity to work with the government on this," said Troszok, whose association includes pharmacies that do the bulk of the Internet and mail-order business from Canada, he said.

Canadian prescription drug prices are controlled by the government, and the drugs often cost about 30 percent less than in the United States. That has led companies and governments to look to Canada for cheaper drugs, and Americans to shop on the Internet for Canadian pharmaceuticals.

Dosanjh and others say that demand will swamp the Canadian pharmaceutical industry, raising prices and causing shortages.

"Our supply chain is geared up to meet the need of 30 million Canadians, and we don't have the scale of operation to be able to respond to the likely demand of the U.S.," said Jeff Poston, executive director of the Canadian Pharmacists Association.

But critics say the big pharmaceutical companies have put pressure on the Canadian government to prevent exports from intruding on the higher-priced U.S. market.

"I think this is a case of the pharmaceutical companies manipulating markets," said Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.), a co-sponsor of one of the bills before the U.S. Congress to remove the federal prohibition on cross-border drug sales.

"We don't have these kinds of restrictions on any other kind of trade -- cars, tires, anything," she added from Washington. "It's ludicrous that the American public should pay the highest prices."

Dosanjh said the restrictions on bulk sales would be imposed "when there is a shortage here," but he could give few details on how and when that would be determined.



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Troszok said major pharmaceutical companies have refused to supply Canadian pharmacies that engage in Internet sales. "It's a cat-and-mouse game with the pharmaceutical companies. They are extremely powerful," he said.

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