

Sen. Sanders: Affordable and Safe Prescription Drug Importation Act introduced to help lower skyrocketing cost of medicine

Posted on Tuesday, Feb 28, 2017

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

WASHINGTON, Feb. 28 – Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Cory Booker (D-N.J.) and Bob Casey (D-Penn.) introduced legislation Tuesday to lower the skyrocketing cost of prescription drugs by allowing Americans to import safe, low-cost medicine from Canada. Reps. Elijah E. Cummings (D-Md.) and Lloyd Doggett (D-Texas) introduced a companion bill in the House.

Both measures would authorize the secretary of Health and Human Services in two years to allow importation from other advanced countries.

In Canada and other major countries, the same medications, manufactured by the same companies, in the same factories are available for a fraction of the price compared to the United States. In 2014, Americans spent \$1,112 per person on prescription drugs while Canadians spent \$772 and Danes spent \$325.

While five major drug manufacturers made more than \$50 billion in profits in 2015, nearly 1 in 5 Americans adult could not afford the medicine they were prescribed.

“I am very proud to join with Sens. Booker and Casey and Reps. Cummings and Doggett and many, many others in the Senate and the House to introduce this critical legislation to lower the outrageous cost of prescription drugs,” Sanders said. “I say to President Trump: Talk is cheap. If you really have the guts to take on the pharmaceutical industry, tell your Republican friends in the House and the Senate

to pass this legislation. Do it tonight in your address to Congress. Or admit to the American people that you were lying to them during the campaign.”

“After he was elected, President Trump said he would bring down drug prices. He also warned that the pharmaceutical industry is ‘getting away with murder,’ and he was absolutely right,” Cummings said. “So, if the President really means what he says, he will support our efforts, and he will encourage his Republican colleagues to do the same.”

“This is common-sense legislation that will allow middle class families and seniors access to safe, affordable prescription drugs through importation,” Casey said. “No family should lack access to prescription drugs simply because of the cost; this legislation will increase competition and help more patients access life-saving drugs.”

Booker said, “Life-saving medications will only save lives if people can afford them. Our common-sense legislation is a step forward, allowing for the importation of prescription drugs under a set of strong and effective standards necessary to ensure consumer safety. Since my days as Newark’s mayor, I’ve been working to find ways to help more people afford prescription drugs, and this bill will do just that.”

“Prescription price gouging threatens both the health and financial security of too many Americans – overpricing is not limited to one pharmaceutical manufacturer, one CEO, or one class of drugs,” Doggett said. It extends throughout an industry that regularly demands all that a sick or dying patient will pay to recover or just to survive a little longer. From EpiPens to insulin, from cancer to hepatitis C, families and taxpayers bear the burden of others’ greed. Today, we say, Mr. President, ‘We are calling you out: stand by your campaign promise.’ Act now against price gouging. Restoring some competition by allowing Americans to import more affordable drugs that meet safety standards is one step toward progress.”

“Americans have the safest prescription drug supply in the world, but struggle to afford the exorbitant cost. Consumers should not have to choose between prescription drug safety and affordability. This bill is designed to address this disconnect and ensure that Americans can access safe and affordable medication,” said Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), who joined the other members at a press conference to introduce the bill.

The legislation, the Affordable and Safe Prescription Drug Importation Act, introduced in the Senate and House, would instruct the secretary of Health and Human Services to put forward regulations allowing wholesalers, pharmacies and individuals to import qualifying prescription drugs from licensed Canadian sellers. After two years, the secretary would have the authority to permit importation from countries in the Organizations for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with standards for the approval and sale of prescription drugs that are comparable to those in the United States.

The bill includes detailed provisions outlining safeguards and consumer protections that ensure the safety of imported drugs, including FDA certification of foreign sellers, a clear definition of what drugs may be imported and supply chain security requirements.

Legally imported drugs under the bill must be purchased from an FDA-certified foreign seller and must have the same active ingredient, route of administration and strength as drugs approved in the United States. The new agreement also cracks down on rogue online pharmacies.

Allowing the importation of safe and affordable prescription drugs is overwhelmingly supported by the American people with 71 percent in favor of allowing Americans to buy prescription drugs from Canada.

Sens. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) Angus King (I-Maine), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Jack Reed (D-R.I.), Al Franken (D-Minn.), Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisc.), Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.), Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.), Tom Udall (D-N.M.), Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), Richard Blumenthal (D-C.T.) and Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) are original co-sponsors of the legislation in the Senate.

Original co-sponsors in the House include: Reps. Gwen Moore (D-Wisc.), Robert Brady (D-Penn.), Ro Khanna (D-Calif.), Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.), Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.), Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio), Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.), Chellie Pingree (D-Maine), Peter Welch (D-Vt.), Ed Blumenauer (D-Ore.), Mark Pocan (D-Wisc.) and Jim Langevin (D-R.I.).

Organizations supporting the bill include: Alliance for Retired Americans, American Federation of Teachers, Center for Medicare Advocacy (CMA), CREDO, DailyKos,

Economic Policy Institute, Justice in Aging, MoveOn, NAACP, National Center for Health Research, National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, National Organization for Women, PharmacyChecker.com, Prescription Justice, Progressive Change Campaign Committee, RxRights and Social Security Works.