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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4104

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The Honorable William Thomas, Chairman
The Honorable Charles Rangel, Ranking Member
Ways and Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Grassley, Chairman
The Honorable Max Baucus, Ranking Member
Finance Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Medicare Conferees:

In reconciling the differences between the House and Senate versions of the Medicare prescription drug language, I urge you to adopt the reimportation provisions that the House adopted in HR 2427 which passed with strong bipartisan support by a 243-186 vote. These provisions will give American consumers access to the FDA-approved medicines in the Canadian market as well as other industrialized countries.

The American people have spoken, as have our leaders in numerous state governments—they are fed up with paying by far the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs that often times their tax dollars helped to develop. They demand that Congress end the “sweetheart deal” that gives the powerful pharmaceutical industry a captive market.

Some have argued that importation will undermine the safety of the U.S. drug supply, but what they really fear is it may undermine the double-digit profit margins of the big pharmaceutical companies. American consumers are already importing \$500 million to \$1 billion in prescription medicines from Canada and elsewhere, yet there are no reported incidents of Americans dying or being injured by tainted or adulterated imported medicines. Additionally, the House provisions do contain strong safety protections requiring the utilization of state-of-the-art counterfeit-proof technology that could be easily and cost-effectively adapted to address concerns about tampering with imported prescription drugs.

Americans have been paying the highest drug prices in the world—three to ten times more than their counterparts in other developed countries pay. Simply adding a prescription drug benefit to the Medicare program will not change that. We need to eliminate the price disparity that Americans pay for prescription drugs by passing a strong drug reimportation law and ensuring that it is actually implemented.

I urge the conferees to adopt the House position as a way of making reimportation safe and secure and giving American consumers true access to a competitive marketplace for life-saving medications.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Johnson", with a large, sweeping flourish above it.

Tim Johnson
United States Senator