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Prepared Remarks
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Task Force on Drug Importation
Public Meeting
April 14, 2004

Mr. Chairman, members of the Task Force.

I come before you on behalf of the citizens of Wisconsin, so many of whom are struggling to afford the costs of basic medical care.

There is no doubt that medical science has yielded discoveries that have extended and improved the quality of our lives. But it is equally true that the skyrocketing price of prescriptions threatens to deny many of our citizens access to these lifesaving cures.

Like most Americans, I am deeply disappointed that the federal government has not done more to address this dramatic inflation in prices, or to provide meaningful prescription drug coverage to those who need it most.

But as I have often said, there is one thing the federal government could do tomorrow that would make prescription drugs more affordable for every American, and that's to allow safe reimportation of U.S. made and approved prescriptions from Canada.

Everyday, I meet people Wisconsin who struggle with the high cost of prescription drugs - and are often forced to make inhumane and unbearable choices between food and medicine ... or skipping a dose.

But just across the border, Canadians can walk into their corner drug store and buy prescriptions for a fraction of what we pay. These are the same medications available here, but may be two or three times as expensive for U.S. consumers.

Because the federal government hasn't acted effectively, states like Wisconsin have been forced to lead the way. In February, we launched a website that empowers our citizens to order these lower price prescription drugs from pharmacies that our state has visited and found to be safe, reputable, and reliable.

The response has been remarkable. Over the last 6 weeks we have had more than 80,000 visitors to the website, an average of more than 2,000 visitors a day trying to find help with affordable prescription drugs.

Here are some of the stories they have shared with me:

Scott wrote to me about how the medications he takes for multiple sclerosis rose from \$960 a month in 2001 to over \$1500 per month today. Every time the manufacturer said it had "improved" the drug, the price went up. But the drug was the same, just in different packaging.

The early, original version required refrigeration and required the user to add a dilutant to a solid drug and draw the mixture into the needle. The new, improved and more expensive version comes in a pre-fill needle. He asked the manufacturer whether he could continue with the original lower cost version and was told that it is now longer available. He wonders why he has to pay \$540 per month for better packaging.

Connie sent an e-mail to tell me that the only way she and her husband can afford the drugs he depends on is to buy them from Canada -- since there are no generic substitutes.

Cari is 48 years old, disabled, and has no prescription drug coverage. She hopes that my website will help her with the costs of the nine prescription drugs she takes.

Clare wrote to tell us that her husband is a transplant patient and his anti-rejection medication costs \$1000 to \$1300 per month depending on the pharmacy used. Her husband is 65 and still working, but she wonders how anyone except the wealthy can afford this medication.

Mary from Brookfield says she has been ordering drugs from Canada for over a year for herself and for her husband. They are senior citizens and take multiple medications and just could not afford the high prices.

Yvonne from Cudahy, Wisconsin takes 20 medications daily. Some she buys from Canada, some she gets in samples from her doctor, and others she will have to drop because she simply can not find a way to afford them. Unfortunately, the drugs she will have to stop taking are the important ones - treatment for her heart and coronary artery disease, chronic pain and depression.

Bonnie asked me if there is anything to help her pay for over \$500 a month in drugs. She had to switch insurance companies and no longer has prescription drug coverage, she is 57 years old.

Bruce wrote saying: "Thanks for your work on drugs from Canada. The only problem is that our insurance company won't cover any of the costs, because they say the drugs are not FDA approved. We need to address that issue."

I get emails from all over the country, because people everywhere are facing the same challenges.

Nicole from California thanked me for posting the information about Canadian pharmacies and taking the time to ensure these are reputable sources. She went on to say that her mother will have to cut back her food budget to afford Celebrex, needed after her foot surgery. The irony

here is that her mother is a former employee of the Federal government - the same government that now steadfastly refuses to take action that will make drugs more affordable.

I understand that the pharmaceutical companies don't want us buying safe prescription drugs from Canada -- because it cuts into their profits. But I don't understand why the federal government isn't on our side, trying to get some help for our citizens.

The Bush Administration has the authority - right now - to allow the safe reimportation of U.S. made and approved prescription drugs from Canada. I hope that this Task Force will recommend the administration use its authority to do just that.

The drug companies have waged an expensive, highly coordinated scare campaign to try to convince people that buying from Canada is unsafe. But do any of us really believe that the Canadian health care system is more dangerous than our own? If we were in Canada and got sick, would any of us really think twice about going to a hospital and taking the medication prescribed to us?

I know there may be a few disreputable pharmacies in Canada, just as there are here. But that's precisely why our state has checked out the pharmacies we're dealing with to ensure that they are safe.

If the FDA has concerns about the safety of these drugs, then I would encourage them to do what our state has done. Put some inspectors on a plane, send them to Canada, and check out these pharmacies for yourself.

It is time for the FDA to stop doing the bidding of the drug lobby, and start helping states like Wisconsin to implement a safe system of prescription drug reimportation. I find it amazing that the FDA has time to send out press releases attacking our website, time to send its staff to Wisconsin to hold press conferences criticizing our efforts, but not to actually work with us to put this system into place. It is a story of missed opportunities and misplaced priorities, and it is a disservice to the American people.

One thing is clear: someone has to stand up to the big drug companies, who have proven they will do anything to protect their profits at the expense of our citizens' health.

U.S. drug manufacturers have threatened to blacklist Canadian pharmacies and cause shortages in Canada if they move ahead with reimportation. I have asked Attorney General Ashcroft to investigate these companies for violations of anti-trust laws.

Unfortunately, Attorney General Ashcroft has taken no action. And unless he does, the 25 largest online Canadian pharmacies have said they won't be able to do business with Wisconsin ... or any other state.

Even more recently we have heard that several merchant credit card payment processors have been scared off from providing their e-commerce credit card services to Canadian mail order pharmacies. Three weeks ago Visa and MasterCard announced that they will not service Canadian mail order pharmacies because they have been under pressure from the FDA to cease their support of payment processing. They cited pressure from the FDA and have warned their member financial institutions to avoid so-called "illegal" transactions.

The simple fact is this: people in Wisconsin - and all over America - need relief from the high price of prescription drugs. Reimportation holds the promise of lower prices, and expanded access to life saving medicines. It is time for the Federal Government to move past the scare campaign and heavy-handed tactics of the drug lobby, and start being on our side as we work to make prescription drugs affordable for all Americans.

No matter what happens, this is an issue that won't go away. The nation's governors are going to continue to fight to make lower price prescription drugs from Canada available here in the United States - and we hope that we will have your support in this effort.