

September 10, 2004

The Honorable Bill Frist  
U.S. Senate Majority Leader  
461 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Frist,

We are discouraged by recent media reports that you may not call prescription drug importation legislation for a vote in the U.S. Senate before lawmakers leave Washington, D.C., despite an earlier commitment to give your Chamber an opportunity to take action on the proposal. We urge you to reconsider.

The high cost of prescription drugs in our country is having a detrimental impact on people of all ages and in all regions of the United States. Recent U.S. census figures show that, for the third straight year, the number of uninsured Americans has gone up – 45 million in 2003, an increase of 1.4 million. That means more people are forced to choose between necessities like groceries and medications.

Unfortunately, far too many people have to make those tough choices. And because Congress and the FDA have failed to find ways to help people afford the high cost of prescription drugs, states and cities have had to deal with the problem on their own.

Providing Americans access to affordable prescription drugs is a consumer issue, not a partisan issue. As Governors from different political parties, we share a common commitment to helping our citizens safely find better prices outside the U.S. for the medications their doctors prescribe – something more than one-million individuals a year are already doing. Our efforts will make a difference for residents in our respective states; but long-term, nationwide relief must come at the federal level.

The U.S. Senate has before it legislation that could permanently break down the artificial pricing system pharmaceutical companies have used to gouge American consumers. The Dorgan-Snowe bill, S. 2328, has bipartisan support from lawmakers in both chambers of Congress. A similar proposal has won approval in the House of Representatives three times. Now is not the time to slow the momentum for change.

We recognize, respect, and echo your wish that all imported drugs are safe and meet the FDA's requirements. By contracting with legitimate and respected foreign pharmacies and sending experts to inspect foreign facilities, we are providing safeguards that are lacking in the current buyer-beware environment. The Dorgan-Snowe bill will go even further by providing a uniform set of safety procedures, including FDA approval of all imported drugs, labeling requirements that meet U.S. standards, counterfeiting measures, and the maintenance of pedigree documentation, which will allow FDA inspectors to verify and check the origin and chain-of-custody of all drugs imported to the U.S.

Furthermore, this bill will rein in the anti-free market practices used by large drug manufacturers to limit the supply of drugs to countries that export to the U.S. Pfizer could no longer threaten pharmacies and wholesalers in Canada and the United Kingdom that have agreed to sell prescription drugs to American consumers at prices they can afford.

We urge you to follow through on your commitment to call the Dorgan-Snowe legislation for a vote this fall. By legitimizing and regulating the importation of prescription drugs we, as a country, can move forward in ensuring that safeguards are in place to give our consumers access to drugs that are both *safe* and *affordable*.

Respectfully,



Rod Blagojevich  
Governor of Illinois



Craig Benson  
Governor of New Hampshire



Jim Doyle  
Governor of Wisconsin