

U.S. Congress threatens Canada's prescription drug supply

OTTAWA, January 10 - Canadian pharmacist and patients' groups warned today that the federal government should act soon to protect Canada's prescription drug supply following the introduction of a bulk-import bill in the U.S. Congress.

"We have been raising concern about this potential catastrophe for the Canadian drug supply system for months. It's now time for Minister Clement to act," stated Dr. Jeff Poston of the Canadian Pharmacists Association.

The Best Medicines Coalition agreed. "Patients can't afford this risk," said coalition chair Louise Binder. "Canadians need reassurance today that prescription drugs will be there when we need them."

Canadian pharmacists and patients' groups have called on the Canadian government to introduce an immediate and straightforward ban on the export, both bulk and retail, of prescription drugs.

In Washington, lawmakers of both houses of Congress said today they will move ahead with legislation to allow prescription drug imports from Canada as a way to address the high cost of prescription drugs in the U.S.

"This is an unsustainable quick-fix for the made-in-America problem of high U.S. drug costs," said Marc Kealey, CEO of the Ontario Pharmacists' Association.

Kealey added, "Congress is telling Americans it's okay to cherry-pick the benefits of Canada's regulated drug system and solve a domestic U.S. problem on the backs of Canadians. Canada cannot afford to become America's medicine cabinet. That threatens the security of our own drug supply and the health and well-being of Canadians."

Poston noted that Canadians have built a drug supply and pricing mechanism that meets Canadian needs. Buying drugs in Canada as a quick fix to high U.S. drug prices is not a solution. U.S. lawmakers should design a system that responds to the needs of Americans instead of jeopardizing Canada's drug supply.

Canada's health minister, the Honourable Tony Clement, remains silent on the issue. His staff have previously said the government does not expect U.S. changes to impact Canada's drug supply.

An independent study by the University of Texas at Austin shows that Canada's current drug supply would only last for 38 days if Americans are allowed to buy Canadian medicine in bulk.

"This is a clear threat to the Canadian drug supply," said Kealey. "We need to hear from the federal government straight away what they plan to do. This is a problem that can be prevented. The government needs to act now."