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Grassley: It should be legal to buy cheaper prescription drugs from other countries
Senator sponsors amendment to ensure timely access to safe, lower-priced pharmaceuticals

WASHINGTON — Sen. Chuck Grassley, Ranking Member of the Committee on Finance, today joined in proposing an amendment that would make it legal for U.S. consumers to buy safe prescription drugs from other countries.

The legislation was filed as an amendment to the Food and Drug Administration Revitalization Act that is under consideration this week by the U.S. Senate. Grassley sponsored the measure with Sens. Byron Dorgan and Olympia Snowe.

Grassley said it's been a long-haul fight to make it legal for Americans to import their prescription drugs. "I hope that the Democratic leadership of the Senate will give this issue more serious consideration than it was given under Republican control," Grassley said. "It will be very disappointing if that's not the case and we only get lip service, rather than legislative action, for American consumers."

Grassley has voted for every amendment that's come before the Senate to allow prescription drugs to be imported. The first was in the year 2000. In 2004, Grassley also sponsored his own comprehensive reimportation proposal (S.2307). In 2005, he combined that measure with a proposal sponsored by Dorgan and Snowe (S.334). This year, Grassley, Dorgan and Snowe reintroduced the Pharmaceutical Market Access and Drug Safety Act (S.242).

"I've always considered this a free-trade issue," Grassley said. "Imports create competition and keep domestic industry more responsive to consumers. In the United States, we import everything consumers want. So why not pharmaceuticals? If Americans could legally access prescription drugs outside the United States, then drug companies would be forced to re-evaluate their pricing strategy. The pharmaceutical industry would no longer have free rein to force American consumers to pay more than their fair share of the high cost of research and development."

Grassley has also worked in other ways to expand access to prescription drugs for Americans. Earlier this year he introduced legislation with Sens. Herb Kohl and Patrick Leahy

to prohibit brand-name and generic pharmaceutical manufacturers from entering into settlements that end up keeping cheaper drugs off the market. In addition, in 2003, Grassley sponsored legislation that created the Medicare prescription drug benefit and included an extensive program to help low-income Americans access prescription medicines with little or no cost.

Consumers in the U.S. pay 60 to 112 percent more for brand-name prescription drugs than consumers in other countries.