

PATIENT SAFETY AND FOREIGN
PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to talk about patient safety and the trade policy of this country as it relates to foreign prescription drugs.

If I correctly recall, and do not trust my memory, we can all look it up, back in March of this year this House overwhelmingly approved a bill that would improve patient safety and improve the quality of care delivered in this country. Some of my colleagues have asked us to consider a plan of imported foreign prescription drugs into this country that would run counter to the vote cast by a majority in this House not 4 months ago.

Mr. Speaker, we must approach this problem with thoughtfulness and logic. If we want to address the cost of prescription drugs in this country, we can take several approaches to lower the cost, but any options should not come at the cost of patient safety. Some in this House believe that if Americans had the ability to purchase their drugs from Canada or Mexico or Belize or Europe or Mars, that the United States market would adjust and reflect the importation of cheaper medicines. But let us be clear, foreign countries place price controls on their prescription drugs.

This means that the drugs purchased by Canadian citizens may be priced lower than that which an American citizen will pay for the same compound because of that government's artificial market intervention; but by permitting the reimportation of drugs into this country, we effectively allow the importation of foreign price controls into the United States market as well. This could be shortsighted, and it does run counter to the free market system that is established in this country. If drug reimportation becomes the established policy in this country, the United States would in essence be allowing foreign governments to set the prices for American products.

If we truly believe in the power of the free market, we should remove the market distortion of foreign price controls which ensure that America's seniors and America's uninsured pay the highest price for their medications. And what happens in countries that have adopted price controls? Companies have left those countries. High-skilled jobs are not available, and governments have lost much-needed revenue.

Because of the stranglehold of regulation in European countries, including price controls on pharmaceuticals, Europe is lagging behind in its ability to generate, organize, sustain innovative processes that are increasingly expensive and organizationally complex. The United States biotech industry in the last decade has had a meteoric rise, but we would place a chill on the industry's

development if we allowed foreign drug prices to stymie its growth.

More importantly, if we inject foreign drug prices and controls into the United States, we will see less innovation in this very promising new field of science. Most importantly, underlying all of the complex trade issues is one that ultimately impacts us all, and that is patient safety. We want to ensure that the drugs that our wives, children, mothers, and fathers take are free of dangerous substances and that they work as advertised. Only our FDA in this country can ensure the safety of drugs for American citizens.

I think this House would be shirking its duty if we created a system that relied upon the action of regulatory officials of Canada, Thailand, Belize, or Barbados to ensure the safety of American patients. Allowing drug reimportation from foreign countries would only be a signal to foreign drug counterfeiters that it is open season on the health and safety of American citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I could relate stories from my medical practice where patients had what may be politely termed as therapeutic misadventures by the ingestion of drugs which were imported illegally from Mexico. The House can approach the drug cost issues through far less shortsighted solutions than permitting drug importation from foreign countries.

Make no mistake, the pharmaceutical companies in this country have an obligation to control their costs and be certain that any profits they receive are reasonable. Without this, we will continue to hear the arguments for reimportation nightly on the House floor. The purchasing power of the Federal Government should bring down the cost of safe pharmaceuticals in this country.

Mr. Speaker, we should remember the admonition of a long-ago physician to first do no harm. In this House, that would be wise counsel to heed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. CROWLEY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

INFORMED CITIZENRY VERSUS
NEED FOR SECRECY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, a critical problem that demands constant oversight in a democracy is the tension between an informed Congress and an informed citizenry because both are necessary for a democracy. That tension is against the need for secrecy in some instances and in the interest of national security. That is what I wish to draw Members' attention to today.

From Watergate to Iran contra, to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, we have seen and experienced and learned from the peril of the executive branch's use of secrecy in the name of national security to accomplish unlawful deception and illegal acts.

We face this issue again now in regard to Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and the flat assertions by the President of the United States that Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction pose an imminent threat to the United States. After all, it was these assertions that led many of the Members of the legislature, both in the House of Representatives and in the other body, to support the war, and so did many Americans.

So it is a significant question whether the President's assurance was warranted by the evidence, whether he had something to back up these repeated assertions that the weapons of mass destruction held by the former ruler of Iraq were indeed an imminent threat to the United States.

So where are these weapons of mass destruction? One day the President assured us that they will be found. The next day we are told that he only meant to claim that Iraq had programs to develop weapons of mass destruction, and that program was under way. But then the day after that his spokesman said never mind, even if Saddam had no weapons imminently threatening us, he was a bad and evil person who deserved to be destroyed.

Now, these contradictions have begun to be noted by more and more people, and I want to report that some in the public are changing their view about this war and what brought us into it as American casualties mount in Iraq, as violence and civilian strife grow worse there, and disease and hunger spread in the aftermath of war.

Now, whatever the ultimate final assessment is that will be made about Iraq, the fundamental problem that I bring to Members' attention this evening is if the President deceives the Congress and the public on an issue as sensitive as war or peace, it raises the greatest constitutional issues about whether he is abusing his office, whether he is violating his oath, and whether he is misleading the American people.

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It is particularly critical because this President's doctrine of preventive war, never before employed by any of the preceding Presidents of this great country, suggests that he may or will be trying to persuade America to support other preventive wars in the future. Will that campaign be based on misrepresentation?

MISSING WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION: IS LYING ABOUT THE REASON FOR WAR AN IMPEACHABLE OFFENSE?

(By John W. Dean)

President George W. Bush has got a very serious problem. Before asking Congress for a Joint Resolution authorizing the use of American military forces in Iraq, he made a