

**Chicago Sun-Times - Letter to the Editors**

**U.S. Passes the Buck on Rx Relief**

November 4, 2003

I applaud the Chicago Sun-Times for getting it right: Reimporting drugs from Canada is an important short-term fix to a long-term crisis that is plaguing our health care system. Americans should not have to pay more for their medicines, especially when the same prescription drugs are sold for a fraction of the price across the border in Canada.

Where I disagree is the argument that other countries are doing too good of a job negotiating with drug companies for affordable prices and that their success is responsible for high prices in the United States. There is no evidence that pharmaceutical companies would lower prices here if they get the opportunity to charge more abroad. Rather than "resulting in an equitable rise in prices for them and an equitable decline in prices for us," the more likely scenario is that drug companies would just add to profit levels that already far outpace other Fortune 500 companies. Raising prices abroad is unlikely to bring price relief here at home but, instead, would harm those U.S. consumers who depend on reimportation as a source for affordable drugs.

The real problem is that our own government, with the exception of Veterans Affairs, which saves its participants up to 50 percent on drug costs, is not even attempting to bargain for affordable prices here at home. U.S. taxpayers pay billions of dollars every year to fund research and development, but U.S. consumers are the only people in the industrialized world whose government does not step in to ensure that prices are reasonable for its citizens.

To gain access to affordable prescription drugs, we should rely on ourselves, not the actions of our friends and allies. Using the bargaining power of Medicare's 40 million beneficiaries to negotiate for lower drug prices is a common sense solution that can bring down costs by up to 40 percent to seniors and persons with disabilities in Illinois and across the country.

Unfortunately, the powerful pharmaceutical industry lobby succeeded in including provisions in both the Republican-passed House and Senate bills to prohibit Medicare from negotiating lower prices for beneficiaries.

Unless and until Congress and the president are willing to take on the pharmaceutical industry and its enormous profits, U.S. consumers must hope that other governments will continue to bargain hard for the lowest drug prices possible.

**Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-III.)**