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Tuesday, June 24, 2003

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## EDITORIAL:

## Getting drugs from Canada will help lower their cost

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It reflects poorly on our national government that it has to turn to Canada for help with the problem of pricey prescription drugs, but doing so is better than no action at all.

With help from Maine Sens. Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, the Senate approved a measure last week that will allow pharmacies and drug wholesalers to import cheaper prescriptions from Canada.

The idea isn't new. As medicine has grown more expensive in this country, Americans are driving north of the border to buy drugs. Prescriptions are cheaper in Canada because of government regulation.

The bill passed in the Senate - technically an amendment to Medicare legislation now under debate - faces an uncertain future. A majority of lawmakers in the House and the Bush administration are believed to oppose it.

Opponents of the drug importation law say it puts Americans at risk because the Food and Drug Administration cannot guarantee the safety and effectiveness of drugs from abroad. What they don't say is that it would also force drugmakers here to lower prices, cutting into their profits.

The safety argument has two flaws. First, Americans are already getting drugs from Canada. Having a U.S. pharmacy or wholesaler oversee the process will bring more controls to the practice.

Second, this is Canada, a nation as developed and as well-regulated as our own. While one has to be careful about differences in



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labeling, there's no credible evidence to suggest that prescriptions from Canada are not as safe and effective as those filled in the United States.

It would be better if Congress would tackle the problem of high drug prices directly. Unfortunately, the powerful pharmaceutical industry has Congress in gridlock. Given that, allowing for the import of drugs from Canada makes sense. Americans shouldn't be denied access to cheaper medicine within reach just to the north.



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