

## LARSON VOTES AGAINST TRADE AGREEMENT THAT THWARTS PRESCRIPTION DRUG REIMPORTATION

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Congressman Signs Petition to Bring Drug Negotiation Bill to the Floor

WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-1) voted against a trade agreement that was before the House today because it contained precedent-setting language that would allow pharmaceutical companies to prevent Americans from buying low-cost prescription drugs imported from other nations. The language was included in the U.S.-Australia Free Trade Implementation Act, H.R. 4759, by the Bush administration's Trade Representative, who said that it would serve as a framework for future trade agreements. This could allow the administration and the pharmaceutical companies to block reimportation from other industrialized nations as well, in addition to Australia.

This provision was undoubtedly included at the behest of the pharmaceutical industry, who are once again working against the interests of the American people because it may interfere with their profits, said Larson. Congress hasn't even decided on the issue of prescription drug reimportation, why is the U.S. Trade Representative deciding it for us now? Gaining access to low-cost prescription drugs imported from other industrialized nations is one of the keys to significantly reducing the prices that Americans pay for their medicines. The House overwhelmingly passed a bill last year that allowed reimportation, only to see it blocked in the Medicare privatization bill the Majority passed, and now they are at it again. Americans pay more for their drugs than any other nation in the world and at the very least deserve the possibility of access to low-cost drugs, instead of simply continuing to subsidize the rest of the world. Overall, this is a good trade bill and I would like to have voted for it. Unfortunately, the language relating to prescription drugs will prevent me from supporting it.

Today Larson also signed onto a discharge petition to bring legislation to the floor that would allow the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies to secure lower drug prices for American seniors. A discharge petition is a procedure that circumvents the regular legislative process and can bring a measure to the floor for a vote without the approval of House Leadership. If a majority of House members - 218 - sign the petition, the Medicare Prescription Drug Savings and Choice Act, H.R. 3767, would come to the House floor for a vote. Larson was the first member to sign the petition after its sponsor, Rep. Martin Frost. Larson has introduced similar legislation, the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act, H.R. 3299, that will allow the federal government to negotiate with the pharmaceutical companies on behalf of the more than 40 million Medicare recipients to determine the highest price they would pay for certain prescription drugs.

It is time for the United States to join the rest of the industrialized world in negotiating lower prescription drug prices for our seniors, said Larson. It is disgraceful that in addition to setting us on the path to privatizing Medicare, the GOP's so-called prescription drug law specifically prohibits the HHS secretary from negotiating lower drug prices for millions of seniors. Directly negotiating lower prices and allowing drug reimportation are the best strategies to address the outrageously high cost Americans pay for their prescription drugs.

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