

Senate Nixes Prescription Imports To Appease Drug Makers

Alan Fram, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate rejected a plan Tuesday to allow Americans to import low-cost prescriptions from abroad, handing drug makers a victory that may help secure passage of President Barack Obama's health care overhaul.

The vote on the amendment by Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., was 51-48 in favor, but 60 votes were needed to prevail under a special rule. Obama had supported the measure as a senator, but his administration echoed safety concerns raised by the pharmaceutical industry — which is supporting the Democrats' health care bill.

An angry Dorgan denounced a competing amendment that would permit drug imports if the Food and Drug Administration certifies it can be done without risks.

"Do not vote for this amendment and say you've done something about the price of prescription drugs because constituents will know better," Dorgan admonished his colleagues.

The alternative amendment by Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., also failed on a 56-43 vote. The House bill is silent on the issue.

Dorgan's plan would have allowed American pharmacies and drug wholesalers to import federally approved drugs from Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan — placing them within reach of average consumers.

Both the pharmaceutical industry and the Obama administration were lobbying against the proposal, saying it would not protect people from potentially dangerous or ineffective drugs. Dorgan's plan would have cost drug makers billions of dollars and had bipartisan support.

A standoff over the proposal had complicated progress on health care overhaul, which has been snagged in the Senate for two weeks.

Lautenberg's state is a center of the pharmaceutical industry. His proposal permits drug imports but adds a requirement that the U.S. government certify that the imports will be safe — a guarantee that Democrats and Republicans agree would be impossible to make.

Dorgan and others saw Lautenberg's amendment as a way to lure away Dorgan's supporters. The North Dakotan has introduced his drug import amendment repeatedly over the last decade, only to see the Senate effectively kill it by adding requirements for safety guarantees.

Senate Nixes Prescription Imports To Appease Drug Makers

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

"We've seen that before, and the pharmaceutical industry supports advancing this as a way to defeat importation," said Dorgan.

Many countries have price controls that let them charge lower prices than are common in the U.S.

Though Obama supported the importation of low-price drugs when he was running for the White House last year, the FDA last week criticized Dorgan's proposal for not doing enough to ensure that drugs entering the U.S. from abroad will be safe. Dorgan countered that his amendment had strong safeguards, allowing imports only of FDA-approved drugs from FDA-approved foreign plants.

White House officials have denied accusations by Dorgan's supporters that the administration was opposing importation as a way of retaining the drug industry's support for Obama's health care overhaul legislation, the president's top domestic priority.

In June, the industry agreed to provide consumers and the government with \$80 billion in savings. Drug makers have spent tens of millions of dollars on TV ads promoting the health overhaul effort, making them one of the biggest advertisers in this year's health care fight, and the administration has little interest in antagonizing its ally.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget office estimated that Dorgan's plan would have saved the federal government \$19 billion over the coming decade. Dorgan says it would have saved American consumers four times that amount.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/24/2014 - 3:37am):

http://www.impomag.com/news/2009/12/senate-nixes-prescription-imports-appease-drug-makers?qt-recent_content=0