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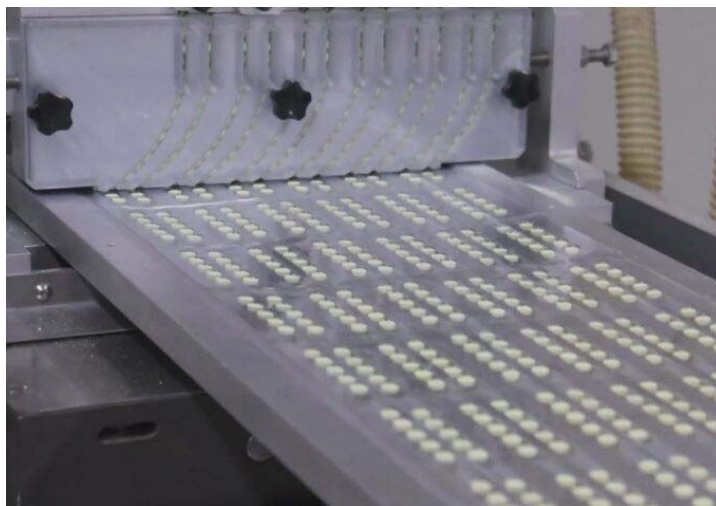
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BY EVE OTTENBERG

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Big Pharma Embattled Over Cheap Drug Imports, Patents



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No sooner does the U.S. government actually fix something, than our true rulers, corporate oligarchs, rush in to undo it. Such was the case in early January, when pharmaceutical mega-corporations swore to combat medicine imports from Canada. The FDA had just approved such imports by the state of Florida, and in case you've been living under a rock this century, just about anybody's drug prices, including Canada's, are lots cheaper than American ones. That's why desperate patients flock north or online to buy inexpensive Canadian medicines. Now, per the FDA, Florida's program to import drugs from our northern neighbor is a go. Needless to say, Big Pharma is furious.

The FDA approved the Sunshine State's program January 5. It is, according to the New York Times that day, "a major policy shift for the United States...Individuals in the

United States are allowed to buy directly from Canadian pharmacies, but states have long wanted to be able to purchase medicines in bulk for their Medicaid programs, government clinics and prisons from Canadian wholesalers.” So the FDA’s move will massively help cut government social welfare spending. Conservatives should love that. Progressives, one assumes, are already on board.

“Florida has estimated that it could save up to \$150 million in its first year,” the Times reports. How fitting that the first state to request to purchase these imports is deep red Florida with a notoriously far-right governor and legislature – fitting in that such people routinely bemoan government spending on social services. Well, now Florida is doing something about this fiscal problem. Hopefully other states, red and blue, will follow suit with FDA approval.

The Times quotes a Health Canada spokeswoman that “bulk importation will not provide an effective solution to the problem of high drug prices in the U.S.” Maybe not, but it’s better than nothing. Anything that gives patients and taxpayer-funded entities like Medicaid a work-around to extortionist pharmaceutical prices is welcome. What Americans pay for life-saving chemo and insulin is a global scandal. So the fact that at least eight other states have similar programs and await an FDA okay is good news. Expect the monstrous corporate pharmaceutical helmsmen to pull out the stops to sabotage these simple, fair, common-sense programs.

Insulin’s discoverer wanted it to be very affordable or free. Not in his wildest nightmares could Frederick Banting have dreamt back in 1921 that in a nation where diabetes is an epidemic, patients would have to pay nearly \$100 per vial lasting 28 days. And that’s EVERY 28 days. That’s because Big Pharma wants insanely exorbitant profits. They get them by bankrupting desperate diabetics or cancer patients, who can either shell out their last cent for chemo or die. Lots of diabetics ration their insulin, which harms their health. Lots of cancer victims choose death, rather than medically driving their families to the poorhouse. It would be interesting to see stats on how many do, that is, how many Americans the pharmaceutical profit motive executes each year. Anecdotal evidence indicates it’s a lot.

Meanwhile, the pharmaceutical lobby will doubtless sue to block Florida’s plan. It has done so over similar efforts in the past. Its main argument is “drug safety.” Safety of drug profits is more like it. I mean, when even Florida governor Ron DeSantis – who attacked COVID-19 vaccines over safety – sues the FDA for delaying cheap drug imports, you know you’re dealing with ruthless pharma extortionists and their pliant government

bureaucrats. Because no one would call DeSantis a bleeding heart. But that doesn't move the FDA: it kept Florida waiting three years before finally approving its program and rejected New Hampshire's application to import cheap medicines last year. No doubt the conspirators to keep drug prices sky-high applauded.

But people like drug importation. A 2019 poll "found that nearly 80 percent of respondents favored importation from licensed Canadian pharmacies," the Times notes. Probably similar numbers of Americans would favor importing, in toto, the Canadian health care system as well, aka single payer. People don't seem too keen on our private-equity-owned system of medicine. Extravagant costs, little care for patient convenience and drugs and hospitalizations that only billionaires can afford have something to do with that.

Not surprisingly, the chief congressional advocate for importing medicines is Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. "More than two decades ago [Sanders] led a caravan of women across the U.S.-Canada border to purchase breast cancer medication," according to Common Dreams January 6. In the House, he pushed laws for more medicine imports, to no avail. "Sanders traveled across the Canadian border again in 2019 with Type 1 diabetes patients looking to buy insulin." And of course, Sanders made history as the most outspoken U.S. presidential candidate to back Medicare4All and to promise to sign it into law if he won. Biden, you may recall, vowed that he would veto M4A, if it came across his desk. I guess Americans collapsing and dying doesn't concern Joe "Lunch Bucket" Biden too much.

Sanders also on December 7 addressed considering price as a factor in breaking patent monopolies on some drugs. This is a white house proposal, which Sanders called "a step in the right direction." There's a lot to be said for breaking these patents. "The American people are sick and tired of seeing hundreds of billions of their tax dollars going to the research and development of new treatments and cures only to end up paying, by far, the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs." Sanders then demanded the Biden team to REQUIRE affordable prices for new prescription medicines developed with taxpayer dollars. Think covid vaccines. Taxpayers financed Moderna's research to the tune of \$10 billion, only to see the company start jacking up its vaccine's prices. In September, Moderna set the list price between \$120 and \$130 per dose.

The White House "should also move to substantially lower the price of the prostate cancer drug Xtandi by allowing companies to manufacture generic versions..." Sanders said. "This is a drug that was invented with taxpayer dollars by scientists at UCLA and can be

purchased in Canada for one-fifth the U.S. price.” And there you have American pharmaceutical medicine in a nutshell: one hand out for government cash, the other deep in the public’s pockets filching every last dime for overpriced treatments that other nations provide for a pittance. This is not a medical system – it’s a racket.

Eve Ottenberg is a novelist and journalist. Her latest book is *Lizard People*. She can be reached at her [website](#).

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