

SANDERS ORGANIZES BUS TRIP TO CANADA TO HELP SENIORS PURCHASE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Trip illustrates need for Congress to pass International Prescription Drug Parity Act

December 28, 1999

BURLINGTON, VT - Congressman Bernard Sanders (I-VT) today announced plans for a January 26th bus trip from Burlington to Montreal to help seniors purchase prescription drugs at affordable prices. Currently, U.S. law prohibits American pharmacists, wholesalers and distributors from purchasing prescription drugs in other countries such as Canada, where pharmaceutical prices are much more affordable. Sanders, who led a similar trip in July 1999, said he hopes the trip will illustrate the need for Congress to act on the bipartisan International Prescription Drug Parity Act which he co-authored and is co-sponsored by 53 Members of Congress.

Sanders said, "Though I am delighted that this trip will enable some Vermont seniors to obtain their medications at a fair price, this is clearly not the long-term answer to the prescription drug affordability crisis that our seniors face. It is an outrage that at the same time pharmaceutical companies are reaping billions in profits, Congress continues to delay action on a bill that would be a major step forward in helping our seniors get the prescription drugs they need. I hope this trip once again shows Congress that it is time to stop listening to the millions of dollars the pharmaceutical industry spends on campaign contributions and start listening to the millions of seniors who desperately need prescription drug relief."

A recent study done at Sanders' request by the House Committee on Government Reform showed that for the 10 prescription drugs most widely used by seniors, older Vermonters are paying 81 percent more than the average prices Canadian consumers pay. Nationally, a similar study showed that the average drug that sells for \$1 in the United States would sell for 71 cents in Germany, 68 cents in Sweden, 64 cents in Canada and 51 cents in Italy.

"There is no rational reason why the same exact drug should be sold in Canada and other countries for a fraction of the price that it is sold in the United States," said Sanders, who led a similar trip in July 1999. "Last year alone, the 10 largest pharmaceutical companies in the U.S. reaped an average of \$2.5 billion in profits off of the grossly inflated prices charged to Americans. At the same time, the pharmaceutical industry spent the most of any industry on lobbying Congress and campaign contributions in order to protect their ability to fleece American consumers. We have now reached a crisis where seniors can no longer afford their medications, and that must be addressed with action from Congress."

The trip from Burlington, Vermont to Montreal, Canada is being organized jointly by Sanders, the American Association of Retired People (AARP), the Champlain Valley Agency on Aging and the Champlain Senior Center. The trip will include a visit to a doctor to receive the prescription necessary to purchase the medications.