

Competition's all right - except for the big drug companies

- July 17th, 2009
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Cheers & Jeers



Mike Crapo...



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JEERS to U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, both R-Idaho, and Patty Murray, D-Wash. Last week, they were on the wrong side of a vote to stop the feds from interfering with individuals who import cheaper pharmaceuticals from Canada.

Sponsored by Sen. David Vitter, R-La., the measure cleared the Senate 55 to 36. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., voted for it.

Vitter's bill is only a symbolic gesture, and it raises issues of product safety to have individuals ordering drugs over the Internet or by mail.

But it gets at a fundamental question: For a group of politicians who say they believe in the power of the market, why would they insulate the pharmaceutical industry from competition?

Americans spend 50 percent more on brand-name prescriptions than they would in other countries.

Pending in the House and Senate is a bill allowing wholesalers and pharmacies to buy drugs from Food and Drug Administration-approved sources in Europe, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

The Government Accountability Office says passing it would save \$50 billion.

Reps. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, and Doc Hastings, R-Wash., and Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., support it.

CHEERS to Gov. Butch Otter. He made a smart choice in selecting former state Sen. David Langhorst, D-Boise, for one of two Democratic seats on the State Tax Commission.

While in the Legislature, Langhorst gravitated toward tax issues and helped broker an interim committee package for property tax relief, which later became law.

Langhorst's appointment comes when the Tax Commission is under fire for cutting private deals on delinquent taxes owed by multi-state corporations. Lawmakers imposed a series of reforms, but Stan Howland, a veteran tax commission auditor who blew the whistle on these settlement negotiations, says the Legislature didn't go far enough.

CHEERS to Idaho House Speaker Lawrence Denney, R-Midvale. This year, he unilaterally killed a modest bill that would have brought Idaho into the mainstream of public ethics. Now he's had a change of heart.

Backed by Gov. Butch Otter, Secretary of State Ben Ysursa and a unanimous state Senate, the measure would have required legislators and state officials to offer a minimum of information about how they make their money and what conflicts of interest they may face. Only three states do not require public officials to disclose personal financial information.

When it got to the speaker's desk, he refused to give it a hearing.

"In the upcoming session, if it comes back, I think we will try to make sure that it gets the full hearing and see where it goes," Denney told the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell.

Of course, that doesn't say much about what happens after it gets a hearing in a committee chaired by one of Denney's lieutenants.

CHEERS to Clearwater County Sheriff's Deputy Carlos Martinez and Lt. Doug Ulmer.

Talk about a pair of professionals being in the right place, having the right skills and making the right choices at the right time.

When 2-year-old Kayla Ladd was swept away into the Clearwater River last Friday, the two officers raced into the water after her. Ulmer swam to her and brought her to shore. Martinez carried the child from the river bank to the help.

When they got to Ladd, the child's body temperature had dropped to 88 degrees. She was treated and later released from Clearwater Valley Hospital in Orofino.

JEERS to Idaho State University President Arthur Vailas. When is this high-paid administrator going to take "no" for an answer?

The State Board of Education says expanding medical school seats through the Washington-Wyoming-Alaska-Montana-Idaho partnership and Idaho's medical residency programs will answer Idaho's chronic physician shortage.

But here was Vailas speaking to the Pocatello Rotary Club last week, plugging away at his plan to build a medical school in this state.

"If we don't do this soon, more and more health care will become unaffordable," he said. "When our health care and education system weakens, our economic outcome becomes negative."

Who is Vailas working for?

CHEERS to Avista. By the time the utility was ready to upgrade its main 115,000-volt transmission line through Moscow, it came up against a new obstacle - a tree house Lee Vierling had built for his daughters, Tia and Kira.

Avista had the right of way. The girls' tree house is located within the utility's 25-foot easement. Instead, the company opted to move its anchors in order to avoid disturbing the tree house. How's that for a bottom line?

JEERS to Republican gubernatorial candidate Rex Rammell. His book, "A Nation Divided: The War for America's Soul," reads like a biblical text. And that's OK for a segment of the market.

But somewhere in his soul, Rammell believes socialism is the tool of the devil:

"... And the capitalists fought back for their freedom and vowed to save the Constitution. And God was on their side. And the armies of socialism led by Satan began to fear. And good men and women rallied to the cause. ..."

You get the idea.

Here's some scripture for Rammell to ponder: "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." - M.T.