



Huckabee: Grant Americans free trade on prescriptions

By Mike Huckabee, Guest columnist | May 27, 2015

I'm disappointed with Republicans who voted last week to empower President Obama with new trade authority. I wouldn't trust this administration to negotiate a deal on a secondhand Subaru — let alone a trillion-dollar trade deal.

One free and fair trade proposal that would actually help Americans by saving them billions isn't even on the table: prescription drug re-importation.

Imagine if Washington could find a simple, easy way to save each American \$500 a year. You'd think we would pass that law today? Wrong.

The average American spends \$1,000 per year on prescription drugs. As a country, we spend almost \$375 billion filling prescriptions annually — almost 40 percent more than any other country. This is a huge expense — especially for seniors.

For too long, Floridians have been paying far too much for prescription drugs. The Sunshine State spends more than \$132 billion per year on health-care expenses. Florida spends substantially more on health care than most other states. As a country, we filled 4.3 billion prescriptions last year.

So why are Americans paying, on average, twice as much for the same prescription drug as Canadians? Why does the same pill, from the same facility, by the same company cost \$2 in Canada and \$10 in Orlando? The answer: Our government makes drug re-importation illegal.

When it comes to prescription drugs, Washington has been empowering insiders and interest groups with sweet deals, while ordinary people keep getting punched in the gut. If Americans paid 40 percent, 50 percent or even 300 percent more for cars, clothes or computers than our trade partners, there would be rioting in the streets.

But today, Canadians pay half of what Americans pay for the same drugs. For some drugs, Americans pay much, much more. This is crazy.

I believe in free, fair trade. If Americans can freely trade sandals, socks, timber and textiles with Canada, it makes sense that we should be able to re-import safe prescription drugs. Trade should be free and fair — in *all* sectors.

Unfortunately, Washington insiders, career politicians and lobbyists have stacked the deck against any American who needs a prescription.

Americans should have the freedom to purchase safe drugs from Canada. In fact, doing so would save taxpayers \$19 billion over 10 years. Re-importation also would create competition here in the United States and lower the cost of drugs for all Americans. It just makes sense.

But what is simple to everyday Americans is just too complex and confusing for the Washington brain trust.

In the Senate, Barack Obama supported drug re-importation. But somewhere between stimulus carve-outs, Obamacare handouts, and Wall Street bailouts, he surrendered on a common-sense reform that would help millions of Americans.

Over the years, free-trade champions like Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley and Arizona Sens. John McCain and Jeff Flake have supported drug re-importation. Sadly, they have lost this battle to the Beltway bandits and better-funded opposition.

Some say that re-importing American-made prescription drugs from Canada is unsafe. But if the United States can put a man on the moon and map the human genome, I'm confident we can figure out a way to safely send pills from Montreal to Miami or Toronto to Tampa Bay. Canadians have strict safety standards, and we can make this work.

I believe in common sense. Washington can tackle this issue and save Americans billions. Americans shouldn't be forced to choose between buying groceries or filling prescriptions.

With millions of Americans out of work, health-care costs spiraling out of control, and a record number of Americans who cannot afford to pay for their prescription drugs, it's time for Washington to abandon excuses and embrace some simple solutions.

President Obama promised "Hope and Change." Instead we got more Washington stupidity and self-dealing. As president, I'll fight for simple solutions to empower every American to go from Hope to Higher Ground.

Mike Huckabee is a former governor of Arkansas and a current GOP presidential candidate. He will be discussing economic issues in Orlando next week at Gov. Rick Scott's Growth Summit on June 2.