

# Drug reimportation growing more likely

By Tony Pugh

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**WASHINGTON** - Several years ago, the Bush administration's opposition to legalizing the purchase of cheaper drugs from Canada was so intense that Andy Troszok of the Canadian International Pharmacy Association couldn't imagine meeting with White House officials about making the practice legal.

Even less likely, Troszok thought, was getting pharmacy benefit managers -- the companies that manage drug benefits for U.S. employers -- to consider buying medications from suppliers in Canada, where they're 30 percent to 60 percent cheaper.

But in recent weeks, Troszok, now president of the group representing Canada's Internet pharmacies, has held talks with both groups. While the meetings were brief, they showed that the momentum behind reimportation is opening eyes and doors that appeared locked just months ago.

Reimportation, the practice of allowing Americans to buy U.S. drugs from Canada and other countries, is now backed or conditionally endorsed by a growing number of Republicans.

Even Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, a longtime foe, now concedes that some form of legalized reimportation is imminent. "I think Congress is going to pass it," he told reporters recently.

The debate is shifting from whether to legalize reimportation to how it might be implemented. In May, Thomas M. Ryan, the chairman of the CVS Pharmacy chain stunned a federal task force studying the issue by endorsing a plan to have retail pharmacies sell foreign drugs imported by U.S. wholesalers.

White House spokesman Trent Duffy said President Bush is awaiting the task force study on whether reimportation can be done safely and effectively and how much it would cost. The results are expected in late summer.