



Senators Feinstein, Coleman Seek To Make Using Internet Pharmacies Safer May 20, 2004

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today joined with Senator Norm Coleman (R-Minn.) to introduce legislation to improve the safety of buying prescription drugs on the Internet and to prevent individuals from obtaining prescription drugs without a prescription.

“The growing abuse of prescription drugs coupled with the ease of access to the Internet has led to an environment where illegitimate pharmacy websites are bypassing regulations governing the sale of prescription drugs,” Senator Feinstein said. **“With a credit card and a computer, consumers can get prescriptions drugs without the existence of a bona fide physician-patient relationship, which can pose an immediate threat to public health and safety.”**

The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy estimates that there are approximately 500 identifiable rogue pharmacy websites operating on the Internet.

This legislation is called “The Ryan Haight Act” for an 18-year-old honor student from La Mesa, California who died after overdosing on painkillers he bought on the Internet with a debit card his parents gave him to buy baseball cards. The bill will:

- Require Internet pharmacies to identify their business, pharmacist and physician for consumers;
- Prohibit Internet pharmacies from distributing drugs to consumers with a prescription based solely on an online questionnaire; and
- Give state Attorneys General the ability to shut down rogue websites nationwide, rather than just in their individual jurisdictions.

“This bill provides a measure of safety currently missing when consumers try to buy medications on-line through Internet pharmacies,” Senator Coleman said. **“No longer will illegitimate web pharmacies be able to operate across state boundaries with impunity and take advantage of vulnerable consumers like Ryan Haight. This bill authorizes states to shut down rogue virtual drug sites in other jurisdictions for the first time and makes it more difficult to obtain dangerous and addictive drugs on-line.”**

Some of these illegitimate websites fail to provide consumers information they need to make decisions about their health and safety. Additionally, using prescription drugs without the supervision of a physician has serious health risks for individuals such as possible drug interactions, addiction to habit-forming substances, and use of tainted products as well as other potentially adverse health effects.

Individuals who have a valid prescription from a doctor will still be able to purchase their medications on the Internet.

“With simple disclosure requirements for Internet sites such as names, addresses and medical or pharmacy licensing information, patients will be better off and state medical and pharmacy boards can ensure that pharmacists and doctors are properly licensed,” Senator Feinstein said.

This bill is supported by the Federation of State Medical Boards and the National Community Pharmacists Association.

###