



## Sessions and Feinstein Introduce Online Pharmacy Bill

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Sens. Jeff Sessions (R-AL) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) have introduced legislation designed to regulate the online sale of prescription drugs and controlled substances.

Entitled the "Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2006," the bill would prohibit the distribution of controlled substances and prescription drugs via the internet without a valid prescription. The bill, introduced Thursday evening, would provide criminal penalties for unlawfully dispensing controlled substances and prescription drugs over the internet, give state attorneys general a civil cause of action against violators and allow the federal government to take possession of property used illegally by online pharmacies.

The legislation also would require online pharmacies to file an additional registration statement with the attorney general and meet additional registration requirements, and report to the attorney general all controlled substances and prescription drugs dispensed over the internet.

In recent years there has been an explosion in the number of online pharmacies that provide prescription drugs - both controlled and non-controlled substances- to users without valid prescriptions. The most abused drugs dispensed without a prescription include hydrocodone, Valium, Xanax, OxyContin and Vicodin.

***"Law enforcement officers in Alabama have expressed concern," Sessions said. "Abuse of controlled substances, often by minors, is a problem we must continually combat. Recently, the internet has exploded with online pharmacies making sales without requiring a valid prescription or verifying the age or identity of the person buying the controlled substance. This has made some of the most dangerous and addictive painkillers easy to obtain without a valid prescription. Often, minors are the individuals ordering these substances over the internet."***

***"Dangerous narcotics are just a click away on the internet," Feinstein said. "You don't need a prescription, a physical examination, or a legitimate reason – all you need is a credit card. This is a recipe for abuse."***

***"A few years ago, I learned of a San Diego youngster named Ryan Haight who became addicted and ultimately overdosed on painkillers he bought on the internet with a debit card his parents gave him to buy baseball cards. I promised to do all I can to help prevent others"***

*from facing the same fate. The legislation we are introducing today would create barriers to the easy access of pharmaceuticals on the internet and prosecute those who operate outside the law. It is my hope that this bill can be approved quickly."*

In 2001, Ryan Haight, a California high school honors student and athlete, died from an overdose of the painkiller hydrocodone that he purchased from an online pharmacy. The doctor prescribing the drug had never met or personally examined Ryan, who simply filled out the pharmacy's online questionnaire describing himself as a 25-year-old male suffering from chronic back pain.

At a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing last month, Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez also discussed the problem.

*"The purchase of these controlled pharmaceuticals on the internet is of great concern," Gonzalez said. "The internet is widely accessible and provides anonymity, both to those seeking prescription drugs and to those dispensing them. Internet sites, either through the websites themselves or through internet facilitation sites, give drug abusers the ability to circumvent the law, as well as sound medical practice, and they dispense potentially dangerous controlled pharmaceuticals. Because there is often no identifying or false information on these websites, it is very difficult for law enforcement to track any of the individuals behind them."*

**Both Sessions and Feinstein are members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which will have jurisdiction over the bill.**

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