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### **Health Minister Clement Again Missing in Action as U.S. opens new risk to Canada's drug supply**

OTTAWA - Minister of Health Tony Clement must act to ensure an American proposal to increase access to import prescription drugs from Canada to the United States does not threaten Canada's domestic supply, said Liberal Health Critic Ruby Dhalla today.

"For months, Minister Clement has failed to put his responsibilities as Health Minister ahead of his personal financial stake in the pharmaceutical industry," said Ms. Dhalla. "Canadians deserve to know that our drug supply and health policies will not be compromised for the Minister's corporate interests. Doing nothing, when the health interests of Canadians are at stake, simply won't do."

Yesterday, a U.S. Senate proposal was approved that would allow the importing of prescription medicine from Canada into the United States. If Congress gives this proposal the force of law, it will prohibit the Customs and Border Protection officials from stopping Americans with doctors' prescriptions for FDA-approved drugs from purchasing Canadian medicines through internet pharmacies and having them shipped into the U.S.

"The potential risks this loophole presents to Canada's health regime requires an immediate response from our government," added Ms. Dhalla. "And once again Canadians get silence from Minister Clement whose refusal to act on a national drug strategy appears as steadfast as his refusal to part with his 25 per cent stake in a Toronto-based pharmaceutical company."

Ms. Dhalla added that this latest incident is yet another consequence of the multiple conflicts and controversies that have plagued Minister Clement since being appointed minister, noting that Minister Clement has decided to skip a meeting with the provinces to discuss a national drug strategy last week.

Ms. Dhalla also highlighted Prime Minister Harper's negligence on this important file.

"It is unacceptable that Mr. Harper failed to bring this proposal up during his meeting with President Bush last week," said Ms. Dhalla. "Surely, protecting Canada's drug supply should rank high enough to have been on his Washington agenda."

Ms. Dhalla also reiterated her concerns that Minister Clement's close ties with his long-time friend and political aide, Gordon Haugh, who went directly from completing a sole-sourced contract for the Minister this spring to his new post as general manager of the Canadian International Pharmacists Association (CIPA)-a key player in promoting on-line pharmaceutical sales-may also be contributing to his inability to stand up for the health interest of Canadians.

"It is clear the Minister's personal and political affiliations are making it difficult for him to do his job. Minister Clement either has to act immediately in the health interests of all Canadians or the time has come for him to step down," concluded Ms. Dhalla.

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