February 16, 2006

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

Richard L. Skinner
Inspector General
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528
Attn: Office of Inspector General

Dear Inspector General Skinner:

I am alarmed by recent reports that U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is once again seizing prescription medications purchased by Americans through the mail or via the Internet from Canada. In 2004, I was informed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that their policy regarding the importation of prescription drugs would allow an American to purchase a 90-day supply of drugs from Canada. But only recently I have been contacted by a number of constituents in Florida who say they have not received their needed medications - apparently because their prescriptions were seized at the U.S. border.

I realize that the importation of prescription drugs is illegal under most circumstances. However, it appears as though CBP is taking unprecedented steps to crack down on seniors who are buying their prescriptions from Canada in order to afford them. By some accounts such seizures have risen to five percent of shipments from less than one percent since late last year. And the number of complaints from my constituents appears to corroborate this.

I am particularly disturbed by the timing of this new waive of seizures. Published reports suggest the government stepped up efforts to block Americans from buying cheaper medicines from Canada at a time when enrollment in the new Medicare prescription drug program is getting underway. This raises questions about whether the government is trying to force seniors to enroll in the new Medicare drug program. If true, this would be especially alarming.

Therefore, I am requesting that you, as Inspector General for the Department of Homeland Security, immediately launch an investigation to determine whether CBP is abiding by the FDA's stated 90-day policy and whether these seizures are linked to the start of the Medicare prescription drug program.

 I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson