Dorgan vows new push on drug prices, tax breaks

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Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., said he would concentrate during his last months in office on advocating legislation to allow prescription drug imports and repeal a tax benefit for American companies that do business overseas.

He also intends to push for a $250,000-per-farm annual limit on federal farm program payments, Dorgan said at a news conference Tuesday.

The Senate has previously rejected Dorgan's proposals, but he said voter unhappiness about the nation's sluggish economy may help rally more support.

"We're worried about federal budget deficits," Dorgan said. "What better way to address them than to save $100 billion over 10 years (in drug costs) for both the consumer and the federal government?"

The prescription drug proposal would allow U.S. consumers to buy medicine that has been approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration from pharmacies in other countries that have lower prices, the result of drug price controls.

The idea was excluded from Congress' recent comprehensive health care legislation after the FDA's commissioner, Margaret Hamburg, said it could threaten the safety of the U.S. prescription drug supply. President Barack Obama supported the idea when he served as a U.S. senator.

Dorgan also has long opposed a tax provision that allows American companies to defer taxes on profits made in their overseas operations as long as the money is invested there and not transferred back to the United States.

"As long as we are offering tax benefits to companies that shut their American plants, fire their American workers and move their production to other countries, we are not going to see the rebuilding of a significant manufacturing capability in this country," Dorgan said.

Supporters of the tax provision say it is similar to how other countries treat foreign earnings of companies based there. It encourages U.S. companies to increase business abroad, which ultimately benefits the American company, and is not an incentive to transfer jobs overseas, they say.

Dorgan, 68, who has been in the Senate for almost 18 years, is not running for his fourth term this fall. North Dakota's Republican governor, John Hoeven, Democratic state Sen. Tracy Potter and Libertarian Keith Hanson, of West Fargo, are competing to succeed him.

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