

Cable: US Government collaboration with drug companies to lobby the Finnish Parliament on drug pricing legislation

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This July 9, 2008 cable concerns the collaboration between the US government and the pharmaceutical industry to lobby Finland on the pricing of pharmaceutical drugs. The cable was written by Michael A Butler, then the Deputy Chief of Mission in Helsinki, and is worth a read. Among other things, the cable says :

- * Finland did not have product patents for pharmaceutical drugs until 1995.
- * Butler says that "Despite Embassy and industry efforts, the Finnish cabinet voted unanimously June 25 to approve a reference pricing scheme for pharmaceuticals."
- * The Department of state says that reference pricing "undermines the value of patent protection for medicines created and manufactured by U.S. and other pharmaceutical companies."
- * Butler promises that "Embassy will engage key parliamentary figures. . . to urge that the government develop a revised proposal that . . . will maintain the level of intellectual property protection that pharmaceutical companies have previously enjoyed in Finland and continue to enjoy elsewhere in the European Union."

The cable further reveals that the US Mission was deeply involved in earlier disputes about the Finnish reimbursement status of particular drugs, and on related legislation and policy issues. For example, Butler writes:

"After much Industry and Embassy lobbying, in 2006, the Finnish government established criteria in Section 57(c) of its Medicines Act that excluded pharmaceutical products from generic reimbursement if they were protected by an analogous process patent in Finland and enjoyed valid patent protection in at least five other countries in the European Union.

But this was just a start. Butler then describes a more aggressive effort:

- 4. Beginning late last year, Econoff and Commercial Officer began working closely with the U.S. pharmaceutical company representatives here in Finland as well as with the local trade association Pharma Industry Finland (PIF) and its director, former Finance Minister Suvi-Anne Siimes to devise a strategy to head off the cancellation of 57(c). Since January 2008 the Embassy has raised this at the highest level of Finnish government, including with the Prime Minister but also with virtually every other minister in the entire government. Our strategy, carefully coordinated with industry and Washington, has focused on underscoring that Finland's knowledge-based economy has attracted much r&d investment, including health-related project funds from the USG. A small IPR deficiency would undermine Finland's deserved reputation for innovation, a blow that was surely not worth the short-term gains from savings. Industry reinforced this message during the visit of Alex Azar, Eli Lilly's Senior VP for Corporate Affairs (and a former Deputy Secretary of HHS) and through intensive lobbying by PIF and Siimes. Siimes has also reached out to the German, French and Swiss Embassies whose companies also stand to suffer under the new arrangement. USTR Ambassador Schwab and Secretary Gutierrez have written their Finnish counterparts on this issue and it has been raised with the Finnish Embassy in Washington and during the visits of high-level Finnish government officials.=====

I am not sure how transparent the US government lobbying of the Finnish parliament is to the Finnish people.

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