

Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Health Hearing Entitled, "H.R. 2610, the Food and Drug Import Safety Act of 2007"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH HEARING ENTITLED, "H.R. 3610, THE FOOD AND DRUG IMPORT SAFETY ACT OF 2007"
September 26, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing today. Our Nation's consumers are experiencing a crisis in confidence in the imported products they purchase, particularly food products. For months, Americans have been inundated with reports of tainted products shipped from abroad: Melamine tainted pet food, antibiotic tainted seafood, lead tainted toys, and tainted counterfeit drugs, and so on.

As these reports surfaced, the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, led by Subcommittee Chairman Stupak, intensified its investigation into how the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) works to protect the public health against tainted food and drug imports. The preliminary results of these ongoing investigations revealed an underfunded importation safety system akin to a block of Swiss cheese.

Last week, Subcommittee Chairmen Pallone and Stupak joined me in introducing H.R. 3610, the Food and Drug Import Safety Act. This legislation takes a proactive step toward correcting the problem of tainted food and drug imports. It closely resembles the discussion draft I released in August.

First, it aims to increase Food and Drug Administration inspections both at the border and abroad by instituting a small user fee. The fee would also fund laboratory analysis to ensure that imports are safe to enter our stream of commerce.

Next, it grants the Secretary authority to ferret out bad actors that seek to game the current regulatory system and pass off bad products as safe for consumption. As our Committee staff stated in their July 2007 report, FDA's current regulatory approach, which relies upon voluntary guidelines for most foods, is inadequate to assure the safety of our modern food supply.

Finally, the bill attempts to strike a balance by rewarding those who employ best practices, allowing them to participate in a voluntary program that gives expedited movement of food imports through the food inspection system.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the comments of my colleagues and the testimony of our witnesses today as this Committee seeks to protect the public health from tainted food and drug imports.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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