



Protecting America's food supply

By: [Rep. John Dingell](#)
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Americans are being forced to play a game of Russian roulette with the food they eat.

We've all heard stories about widespread food poisoning — with sometimes deadly consequences.

Yet legislation that could transform the nation's food-safety laws continues to languish in the Senate, while American families are forced to hope for the best and fear the worst.

This was supposed to be the week the Senate took up a monumental food-safety bill, making the most fundamental changes in our food-safety laws since 1938.

I know there are many lawmakers, on both sides of the aisle, who care deeply about this. I am appealing to them to move this bill. President Barack Obama has said he wants something done. Now is the time to make it happen.

Already this year, we accomplished a legislative pursuit that has challenged generations of leaders, delivering on the promise of access to health care for all Americans. But that was one part of the solution for our broken health care system. Reform also requires an increased emphasis on prevention.

The next big health challenge is addressing food safety — particularly preventing food-borne illness. We passed a bipartisan bill in the House that does just this.

It is easy to lose sight of the importance of addressing food safety without a major outbreak in the news. And it will be easier to overlook the importance of the issue as we wade deeper into partisan divisions over financial regulatory reform and Supreme Court matters.

But we delay action on this bill at the peril of the American people. We cannot wait for another outbreak before we act.

The facts about the impact of unsafe foods have not changed. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, food-borne diseases cause approximately 76 million illnesses, as well as 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths in the United States every year.

The total economic impact of food-borne illness in the United States is \$152 billion annually, a recent study by the Produce Safety Project estimated. Clearly, addressing our food-safety concerns would be a big piece of the overall health prevention puzzle.

I wrote comprehensive food-safety legislation to break the cycle of apologizing to grieving

families because the government had been derelict in its duty of protecting U.S. consumers. The Food Safety Enhancement Act grants the Food and Drug Administration the tools and resources to bring our approach to food safety into the 21st century.

The bill passed the House last July with bipartisan support. To put the Senate's delay to act on similar legislation in perspective, since the bill passed the House, more than 150 food-related safety alerts, market withdrawals and recalls have been issued by the FDA and the food industry.

The food-safety act places a premium on prevention, so we no longer react to food-safety problems only after they occur. It gives FDA the tools to hold manufacturers accountable for the safety of the food they provide American consumers.

Our food supply is increasingly global, with more and more products coming from foreign countries. This food-safety act ensures that foreign manufacturers meet the same quality standards that U.S. firms must meet.

It also grants FDA the resources and personnel to provide proper oversight and ensure that manufacturers are doing all they can to give U.S. consumers safe food.

Ironically, FDA's deficiencies extend to the other products it is responsible for — drugs, medical devices and cosmetics. I plan on pressing in the near future for consideration of legislation I wrote concerning these areas.

There are moments when problems are identified, appropriate solutions crafted and yet no action is taken to remedy the maladies of the American people.

These moments are rare and unfortunate.

The House has taken appropriate action. The longer the Senate delays action, the longer a remedy to a serious problem remains.

Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) is currently the longest-serving member of the House.

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