

Congressman Wally Herger (CA-2)

Subcommittee Hearing on Import Safety Issue

Opening Statement

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Thank you, Chairman Levin.

Americans have the right to know that all the products they buy, whether imported toys or U.S. grown spinach and beef, are safe and healthy. We have seen several recent cases where the products bought by American consumers were not safe. In most cases our system was able to catch these products before significant harm was done. Unfortunately in some cases the system was not.

We need to carefully review the procedures we have in place to ensure the safety and health of American consumers. I look forward to hearing from the Administration on the steps it takes to ensure the safety of domestic and imported products. I also would like to hear how the Administration is seeking to enhance cooperation among the many federal agencies responsible for product safety, especially the role of Customs and Border Protection officers at our ports.

I also want to examine today all aspects of ensuring the safety of the products Americans buy, whether foreign or domestic. As the recent recalls of U.S. agriculture products attest, this is not just an import issue.

The Administration is obviously taking this issue seriously with the formation of the President's Interagency Working Group on Import Safety. I'd like to hear from our witnesses about the Working Group's initial report and on what additional recommendations it will be making.

We must also realize that we cannot rely on border inspections alone to ensure the safety of the products we import. It is neither financially nor logistically feasible for the United States to inspect every product imported into the country, nor would 100 percent inspection guarantee safety.

Rather, we need to work with producers throughout the supply chain, importers, and foreign governments to ensure that all necessary steps are taken ensure the products they produce and ship are safe.

I believe we need a risk-based system that is flexible enough to deal with the thousands of different types of products purchased by Americans. The best system for ensuring the safety of seafood is not necessarily the best system for ensuring the safety

of furniture. A one-size fits all approach will not provide the most effective safety system for American consumers.

I also want to take this opportunity to point out that our trade agreements do not force the United States to lower its standards. In fact, our trade agreements allow us to raise the safety standards of our trading partners because the burden is on them to prove that the products exported to the United States meet all our safety requirements.

Several pieces of legislation would impose new user fees to pay for increased inspections. Before we impose any new user fees, I want to know whether such fees would actually improve safety and whether they would unduly burden trade and increase costs on consumers.

Americans rely on imports, whether it is affordable toys, fresh fruit and vegetables in the winter, or tropical products that do not grow in the United States. We should resist the temptation to use unscientific restrictions simply to limit imports in the name of health and safety. Shutting off or severely limiting imports is not the answer.

We need a risk-based system that pushes out our borders and ensures the safety of products through the entire supply chain, from farm to factory to the final consumer. I look forward to the testimony.