

Rothman Co-Sponsors the Human and Pet Food Safety Act of 2007

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Congressman Rothman Co-Sponsors the Human and Pet Food Safety Act of 2007

(Washington, DC)—Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) has co-sponsored the Human and Pet Food Safety Act of 2007 (H.R.2108) in response to widespread news reports of contaminated pet food, as well as nationwide quarantines and/or recalls of human food, such as tainted pork, spinach, and peanut butter. The nationwide food scares highlight weaknesses in the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) authority to recall and regulate imported food products and enforce existing food safety standards.

"We live in a global economy where our food comes from all over the world and we need to do a much better job of ensuring that our food is safe, especially when such low food safety standards exist in many other countries. I am proud to co-sponsor legislation to address the problem and commend my colleague, Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), for introducing it," said Rep. Rothman.

Currently, the FDA does not confirm whether trading partners have food safety standards equivalent to those of the United States. This safety gap is a serious threat because the FDA inspects less than 1.5% of imports. H.R. 2108 would direct the FDA to establish a certification program with trading partners. Foreign food safety systems and plans would be inspected by the FDA prior to certification and the Secretary of Health and Human Safety would have the authority to deny imports if the food or food products presented a public health risk.

H.R. 2108 would also give the FDA the authority to issue mandatory recalls for contaminated or dangerous food, and establish an early warning and notification system for human, as well as pet, food products. The FDA must now rely on the food industry to voluntarily pull products from store shelves to prevent outbreaks of E. coli, as one example, from spreading further.

Food-borne illnesses are a growing concern in the United States. In April 2007, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released data showing infections from E. coli, Salmonella, and Vibrio on the rise. The CDC also estimates that as many as 76 million people suffer from food poisonings each year. Of those individuals, approximately 325,000 will be hospitalized and more than 5,000 will die.

Rothman is a member of the powerful House Appropriations Committee, which makes decisions about federal spending. Among other Subcommittees on which he serves is the Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies (chaired by Congresswoman DeLauro) which oversees funding for the FDA.

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