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Killing Us Softly – weak regulations scramble food safety : by Ted Ankrum

More people were killed in the United States last year by tainted food than US troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan since the wars began. How can this happen?

It happens for a number of reasons.

- It's because our food comes from all over the World, and
- ever more of our food comes from mega-producers that ship from one or a few locations, and
- we don't have food safety standards equipped to deal with today's distribution system, and
- insufficient food safety inspectors can't even enforce the lax regulations now in place, and
- the FDA, which should have the power to order recalls when they find problems, has not been given that authority by Congress.

Government should do those things its' citizens cannot do for themselves. I certainly can't test each head of lettuce or each egg I bring home from the supermarket for salmonella bacteria. I can't ensure that the eggs I give to my children are free of bacterial contamination by washing them off when the contamination comes from infected chickens and is inside the shell. I can't test the dog food from China, deliberately laced with the plastic melamine in order to falsely inflate a test for protein that killed my dog. And it also appears that I can't trust the food companies to self-inspect. It takes laws to require testing and inspections AND government inspectors to enforce them. Yet, we do not have the laws since Congress won't pass them. Too many members of Congress are "owned" by the affected industries. The last administration measured its' success by how many government inspector's jobs it has eliminated. Now, who is going to be there to protect us?

The voluntary recall of a half-billion eggs from two major producers after more than a thousand Americans have fallen ill in 28 states shows just how much we all are in the hands of so few. Thankfully, the producers did a voluntary recall, but what if they had stonewalled for a while, as Toyota did with their sudden acceleration problem? A bill to allow for mandatory recall authority for the FDA (H.R. 2749) passed the House in July 2009, but is stalled in the Senate. Republicans are preventing the bill from getting the 60 votes needed to pass. But I bet my opponent for Texas Congressional District 10 (Houston to Austin) would like to take

his NO vote back, now; or have his constituents forget it. His website McCaul Minute of July 24, 2009 stated: "I oppose this bill because it would give the FDA unprecedented authority over agriculture and would increase farm costs". Those "farm costs" he is talking about are those of the mega-producers that fund Republican campaigns. Rather than voting to protect the profits of the mega-producers in other States, why isn't he concerned about the health of the people in his District who eat this food?