

Donkeys And Elephants Agree To Overhaul Food Safety

Kevin Freking, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bipartisan group of senators said Thursday they have reached agreement on legislation designed to enhance the safety of the nation's food supply, setting the stage for the full Senate to take up the measure later this year.

The bill would give the Food and Drug Administration the power to order a food recall rather than merely request one. The agency would also increase the frequency of inspections at processing plants and other facilities. The food industry itself would help pay for the increased inspections through additional fees.

Each year, more than 300,000 Americans are hospitalized and 5,000 die after consuming contaminated foods and beverages. Large recalls involving spinach, tomatoes, peppers and lettuce led lawmakers to attempt to strengthen food safety laws.

The bill does not contain a proposal by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., to ban a chemical widely used to line food cans, but she plans to offer an amendment when the bill goes to the Senate floor that would ban Bisphenol A from baby bottles, baby food and infant formula. The chemical has been linked in animal studies to reproductive and neurological disorders.

The House has already approved a food safety bill. Supporters are lobbying Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to hold a vote on the Senate version next month.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, unveiled the legislation Thursday. It would require importers to verify the safety of their foreign suppliers and would require businesses that manufacture and process food to have in place plans to prevent adulteration.

"I am pleased that after a great deal of time and effort from members on both sides of the aisle, we have a strong, bipartisan proposal that will overhaul our current food safety system — a system that right now fails far too many American consumers," Harkin said in a news release.

Source URL (retrieved on 03/27/2015 - 3:07pm):

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