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KOHL MEETS WITH FDA COMMISSIONER TO PLAN FOOD SAFETY & OTHER AGENCY GOALS

Senator is Chairman of the Agriculture Appropriations panel with oversight of the Food and Drug Administration

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Herb Kohl today met with Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Dr. Margaret Hamburg to discuss the agency’s funding priorities for the next fiscal year. Kohl is the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee which has jurisdiction over the FDA’s budget, and has worked closely with the Administration on their efforts to keep the food supply safe. Kohl pushed the FDA to increase the number of food safety inspectors domestically and abroad, and to develop new, regional rapid response teams across the country to identify and isolate contaminated produce at its source.

Kohl has also worked closely with the FDA in their efforts to coordinate vaccine development and production, move more affordable generic drugs to the market sooner, and monitor the safety and effectiveness of medical devices.

“Last year we worked to pass a major overhaul of our country’s outdated food safety laws to reflect a modern food supply chain that can begin an ocean away. Once implemented, most of the work will fall at FDA’s feet and we want to be helpful as they begin this complicated process,” Kohl said.

Kohl began a comprehensive review of the nation’s food safety laws in 2007. Last year, in a report commissioned by Kohl, the Institutes of Medicine (IOM) noted that the FDA is responsible for overseeing approximately 80% of the U.S. food supply, including all produce, seafood and cheeses. The report states that food-borne diseases caused by bacteria such as E. Coli or Salmonella, in addition to viruses, parasites and chemicals, lead to 76 million food-borne illnesses each year in the United States. Of those cases, serious illnesses lead to 300,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths. The IOM report called on the FDA to continue to integrate food safety inspection and surveillance programs between the state and federal government, something Kohl initiated several years ago.

Late last year, Congress passed the Food Safety Modernization Act, the first comprehensive reform of the nation’s food safety laws since the 1930’s. The law includes a provision championed by Kohl that allows the FDA to refuse imported food from a foreign facility that does not allow U.S. inspectors into the country to inspect a facility within 48 hours of a request to enter. Kohl and Dr. Hamburg discussed the implementation of the law, which expands the FDA’s authorities, and the additional resources the agency will need to carry it out.

In January, Kohl introduced the Food Safety Accountability Act which increases criminal penalties on those individuals who deliberately put our food supply in jeopardy.