

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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REGULATORY REFORM & THE MEDIA

FACTS ON SIDE OF REFORM, DESPITE ONGOING DISTORTIONS

The liberal opponents of commonsense regulatory reform must be celebrating after watching some of this week's reports on the evening news, and reading some of the stories and columns in some of our most distinguished newspapers. Last night, a report on ABC's "World News Tonight" claimed Republican supporters of regulatory reform are "on the defensive." And it's no wonder, considering how the media has fed the American people a steady diet of phony claims that we are out to promote tainted meat and unhealthy food.

Liberal New York Times columnist Bob Herbert a few days ago took a page out of the liberal consumer activist playbook, labeling our regulatory reform bill "an all-out assault on food safety regulations," adding that it "would block implementation of the Agriculture Department's meat safety initiative for two to three years, and probably longer."

If this outright distortion wasn't enough, listen to this from Margaret Carlson's "Outrage of the Week" on CNN's "Capital Gang": "Senator Bob Dole, under the guise of regulatory reform, is letting the meat industry lawyers block this" meat safety test. Wrong again.

One network aired a report Monday night that included the following, and I quote: "with Senator Dole's regulatory reform bill, industries could challenge rules they considered too costly or too burdensome. Thirteen-year-old Eric Mueller died in 1993 from e-coli poisoning after eating a fastfood hamburger. His father says any delay in adopting new meat inspection rules is a travesty" -- end quote. This is indeed a tragic story. The only problem is, this report, like so many others, was simply wrong in its suggestions about this bill.

Our legislation has always made it explicitly clear that regulations are exempted from any delay if there is "an emergency or health or safety threat." Additionally, the Agriculture Department has already conducted a cost-benefit analysis of the meat inspection rule and it passed. But the facts didn't stop that network from reporting Monday night that "a delay is looking more and more likely."

However, on Tuesday, if it wasn't clear enough already, we specifically added to the bill the words "food safety, including an imminent threat from e-coli bacteria."

But that didn't stop the media's drumbeat on food safety. Last night, a network anchor for whom I have great respect claimed that on regulatory reform, Republicans "went further than the public may want on the issue of food inspection." Wrong again. I don't know how many times we have to say it to get the media to understand the fact that this bill does not compromise food safety. Yesterday, the former head of the FDA and 4 eminent scientists and physicians spoke at a press conference to explain how our bill protects food, health and the environment -- but the media didn't seem to notice.

But ABC didn't stop with the issue of food safety. Then they broke out the chainsaws, the strip mining, pesticides, potentially dirty drinking water, and cute endangered animals in their effort to explain the impact of regulatory reform.

These are just a few examples of the kinds of distortions we've had to confront on this bill. And I'm not the only one who has noticed this trend. According to a study released last week by the Advancement of Sound Science Coalition, "media coverage of the congressional debate over environmental regulatory reform slants 'clearly against the regulatory revisions.'" According to Dr. Robert M. Entman of North Carolina State University, who conducted the study, there was a three-to-one negative imbalance in news stories about reform between last November and this May 11th. Not surprisingly, the study claims that 74% of paragraphs that evaluated reforms were critical, criticism reached 87% on editorial pages, and 70% of the stories on the commercial television networks and in weekly news magazines criticized reform.

I know the media has a tough job to do. But if I believed everything I saw on the evening news or in the newspapers, I'd vote against this bill, too. Fortunately, the facts are on our side, even if some folks in the media are not.