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The Washington Times

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Questionable motives behind supplement bill

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By

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Michelle Minton got it exactly right in her July 29 article, "The coming war on vitamins." We feel further compelled to explain that Sen. Dick Durbin, Illinois Democrat, has a credibility problem.

He says his bill, the Dietary Supplement Labeling Act of 2011 (S.1310), is addressing "a product on the market now that is escaping regulation as an adulterated food by marketing itself as a 'dietary supplement.'" He is referring to Lazy Cakes, the notorious brownies laced with melatonin, a sleep-inducing hormone. But the Food and Drug Administration already has moved against Lazy Cakes and shut down their production.

The agency had the authority to do this all along. Why did it wait this long? Was it to support the senator's bill?

The senator's credibility problem doesn't stop there. The problem he describes is one of adulterated food, but the bill is all about supplements. It is supposed to stop "mislabeling products and making health claims that have no scientific basis." But this is already illegal under federal law, as the senator surely knows.

The idea behind this legislation seems to be to set up at least the beginnings of a new joint FDA-Institute of Medicine review and approval process for supplements. In thinking about this, let's keep two things in mind. First, if Mr. Durbin has his way, supplements could easily end up costing as much as drugs. Drug companies would love this because competition from safer and lower-cost supplements would disappear. Second, the FDA and the Institute of Medicine are poor choices for supplement watchdogs; neither has any real supplement expertise and both are biased against supplements and in favor of drugs, which, of course, pay the FDA's bills.

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