

(November 20, 2007) Democratic lawmakers insist they'll beef up Consumer Products Safety Commission

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by Ava M. Tabb

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While urging parents to be vigilant in their holiday shopping, Illinois Democratic members of Congress said they'll press ahead with efforts to improve the safety of children's toys by strengthening the Consumer Products Safety Commission.

The CPSC has called for millions of units of some the most popular toys on the market to be pulled from store shelves, including Thomas the Tank Engine, Dora the Explorers, Sponge Bob Square Pants, Curious George, Elmo and others. Lead paint and loose magnets are the main reasons for recall. Most of the toys are made in China.

In a news conference at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago, Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) emphasized, however, that when CPSC Chief Nancy Nord was offered in a Congressional hearing a large budget increase to improve the safety of America's toys and said no, "it's clear that we need a new commission. They haven't stood up time and time again. They are unfortunately in the laps of the industry that they are suppose to be regulating."

As chairman of the appropriations subcommittee that funds the CPSC, Sen. Durbin said, he plans to offer President Bush a choice.

"He can increase the funding for this commission and we can hire a few more [toy inspectors] or he can use his veto pen as he's used it over and over again. I hope that he'll decide that families are more important," he said.

When asked what parents should do when shopping for toys, Sen. Durbin said, "I don't know what to tell people. When it comes to other toys I don't know where to turn, because when it comes to toys some of them can look safe but be absolutely lethal."

Durbin said 80 percent of toys in America are made in China. More than 25 million Chinese-manufactured toys were recalled this summer.

"The best holiday gift that Congress can give its littlest consumers this holiday season, our children, is to pass a tough law to make sure that products out there on store toy shelves are safe," said Brian Imus, director of the Illinois Public Interest Research Group, which called the news conference.

Rep. Bobby L. Rush (D-Chicago) said, "Every toy that looks like a safe toy might not be a safe toy, and just because it looks engaging it is not an engaging toy."

Rush has introduced H.R. 4040, the Consumer Product Safety Modernization Act, to establish tougher consumer product safety standards and other safety requirements for children's products and to reauthorize and modernize the CPSC.

Rush said, " There is help on the way. We're going to make sure that the [CPSC] does exactly what it's supposed to do. We're going to end the closing relationship that exists between them and the corporation. We're going to make sure that every toy in the hood is safe in the hood."

Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-Chicago) said that there is no reason for a large number of toy recalls in America, and he criticized the way CPSC has handled this situation.

"It is really a disgrace that the CPSC can't do more and when offered help the head of the CPSC said she didn't want more help," he said. "Congress has the duty to step up and give the CPSC more power, more responsibility and funding so that dangers are relieved out there."

He continued: "And the CPSC must be put under pressure to actually perform the job that they're suppose to do of protecting America's consumers and especially our children."

Lipinski assured consumers that he and other lawmakers will work to make sure that CPSC provides safe toys for children.