The Food Agenda — 2011

Last year was extraordinarily productive. It started in March with passage of the health-reform law, which mandated calorie labeling on menus and menu boards at chain restaurants and provided roughly $1 billion per year to promote healthy eating and physical activity.

The year ended in rousing fashion when, in the final nail-biting weeks, Congress passed two laws: one that will get junk foods out of schools (we’ve been rooting for that since the late 1970s) and one that gives the Food and Drug Administration the power to prevent foodborne illnesses instead of just patching things up after people get sick. That law constitutes the biggest improvement in the FDA’s ability to protect the public’s health since 1938!

Now we need to ensure that those gains aren’t rolled back.

On food safety, for instance, consider the views of Representative Jack Kingston of Georgia, the incoming chair of the House Appropriations subcommittee that funds the FDA. Kingston is vowing to withhold funding for the new FDA inspectors.

“This is big government, nanny-state overreach,” he said recently. “Our food is 99.99 percent safe. It’s absurd how safe our food is.”

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