

**DRUGS** (Continued from p. 5)

companies, and conflicts between drug-company profits and public health. For an industry representative to sit on the FDA.

**Adverse drug reports**

review panel for a specific drug constitutes a conflict of interest if he has financial ties either to the manufacturer of that drug or to a competitor. These conflicts of interest are often waived at the FDA for the sake of industry expertise. Broader philosophical issues, such as public health concerns, do not require such a waiver.

One example of the latter is the elimination of Dr. Curt Furberg from an FDA discussion panel on COX-2 drugs—a category which includes Vioxx and Bextra—for publicizing his independent analysis of scientific data regarding similar risks of heart attacks and strokes from the two drugs.<sup>19</sup> Dr. Furberg is a professor of public health at Wake Forest University School of Medicine. Furberg commented: “The result is [Bextra] looks like Vioxx, and we need to be careful. Pfizer is basically saying ‘Our drug is safe until we have more information,’ and my position is the opposite. I am saying we need to know it is safe before we use it on a large scale.”<sup>20</sup>

**What you can do**

Encourage your Senators to back legislation to separate the Office of Drug Safety from the FDA and to oppose the medical malpractice bill which would exempt pharmaceutical companies from punitive damages.

Support the ANH campaign for access to supplements (see insert this issue)


**Endnotes**

- 1 Henderson, Diedtra, AP science writer; “FDA reviewer says Vioxx is not only risky drug,” 11/19/2004 [www.healthy.net](http://www.healthy.net)
- 2 VandeHei, Jim; “Malpractice bill shields Vioxx maker,” *The Washington Post*, provided by *The Wenatchee World*, Jan. 5, 2005
- 3 Kay, Joseph; “The Vioxx scandal: damning Senate testimony reveals drug company, government complicity,” Nov. 22, 2004, Health Supreme, [www.newsmediaexplorer.org](http://www.newsmediaexplorer.org) or [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org)
- 4 “The FDA: Hazardous to Your Health!” Excerpted from “Dangerous Prescriptions,” PBS Frontline & Resolute Films documentary, Nov 15, 2003
- 5 Henderson, Diedtra, AP science writer; “Expert Warns Against 5 FDA-Approved Drugs,” Nov 18, 2004, <http://news.myway.com>
- 6 See note 4
- 7 Kay, see note 3
- 8 “FDA under fire,” <http://money.cnn.com>.
- 9 See note 4
- 10 See Kay, note 3
- 11 First warning label for Vioxx
- 12 “Merck, FDA grilled at Senate Hearing,” CNN/money, Nov 18, 2004

(Continued on p7)

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Furberg's analysis showed a doubling of risk of heart attack and stroke among heart disease patients taking Bextra.<sup>21</sup>

The Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), Chairman of the Finance Committee, suggested an independent board of drug safety may be needed to ensure the safety of medications after FDA approval.