

Lapdog, not watchdog

by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

It's time to recall Nancy Nord.

The acting chief of the Consumer Product Safety Commission was weak-kneed in dealing with a series of recalls of tainted products made overseas last summer. And she has acknowledged accepting free trips worth thousands of dollars from the very industries she is supposed to be watching.

Nord and her predecessor, Hal Stratton, claim they were sharing information with industry leaders about commission priorities and discussing toy safety. They defend their trips as a way to stay in contact with manufacturers and to hear their concerns.

Haven't they heard of the telephone? E-mail? Teleconferencing?

The Washington Post reported that records showed nearly 30 trips since 2002 by Nord and Stratton that were paid for in full or in part by trade associations or manufacturers of products ranging from space heaters to disinfectants.

Perhaps we'd be more forgiving if Nord was doing a bang-up job as acting chairman. But she was slow to react to the spate of problems with toys and other products imported from China. And the scares keep coming: last month, fake Halloween teeth tainted with lead; last week, a toy contaminated with the date-rape drug.

Nord can't be blamed for the inability of the Chinese to police themselves. But she even opposed a measure that would have added staff to the commission. She opposes provisions in the bill that would extend protections to whistle-blowers and make it easier for the government to make public reports of shoddy products.

We'd agree with the assessment offered by Ann Brown, who chaired the commission during the Clinton administration:

"Acting Chairman Nord is totally wrongheaded in her approach. She's forgotten that it's the Consumer Product Safety Commission, not the Business Product Safety Commission."

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