

April 25, 2005      Millions of Americans take dietary supplements every day, and the numbers are growing as the Baby Boom generation ages. More and more Americans understandably are frustrated with our government-controlled health care system. They have concluded that vitamins, minerals, and other supplements might help them stay healthy and less dependent on the system. They use supplements because they can buy them freely at stores and research them freely on the internet, without government interference in the form of doctors, prescriptions, HMOs, and licenses. In other words, they use supplements because they are largely free to make their own choices, in stark contrast to the conventional medical system. But we live in an era of unbridled government regulation of both our personal lives and the economy, and Food and Drug administration bureaucrats burn to regulate supplements in the same manner as prescription drugs. The health nannies insist that many dietary supplements are untested and unproven, and therefore dangerous. But the track record for FDA-approved drugs hardly inspires confidence. In fact, far more Americans have died using approved pharmaceuticals than supplements. Not every dietary supplement performs as claimed, but neither does every FDA drug. The FDA simply gives people a false sense of security, while crowding out private watchdog groups that might provide truly disinterested consumer information. It fosters a complacent attitude and a lack of personal responsibility among people who assume a government stamp of approval means a drug must be safe, and that they need not study a drug before taking it. The FDA, like all federal agencies, ultimately uses its regulatory powers in political ways. Certain industries and companies are rewarded, and others are punished. No regulatory agency is immune from politics, which is why the FDA should not be trusted with power over our intimate health care decisions. The real issue is not whether supplements really work, or whether FDA drugs really are safe. The real issue is: Who decides, the individual or the state? This is the central question in almost every political issue. In free societies, individuals decide what medical treatments or health supplements are appropriate for them. Over the past decade the American people have made it clear they do not want the federal government to interfere with their access to dietary supplements. In 1994, Congress bowed to overwhelming public pressure and passed the Dietary Supplements and Health and Education Act, which liberalized the rules regarding the regulation of dietary supplements. Congressional offices received a record number of comments in favor of the Act, which demonstrates how strongly Americans feel about health freedom. The FDA simply has thumbed its nose at Congress and ignored the new rules in many instances, by attempting to suppress information about health supplements. But in 1999 a federal appellate court affirmed that the American people have a First Amendment right to such information without interference from the FDA. However, members of Congress have had to intervene with the FDA on several occasions to ensure that they followed the court order. My regular listeners already know about another looming threat to dietary supplement freedom. The Codex Alimentarius Commission, an offshoot of the United Nations, is working to “harmonize” food and supplement rules between all nations of the world. Under Codex rules, even basic vitamins and minerals will require a doctor’s prescription. As Europe moves ever closer to adopting Codex standards, it becomes more likely that the World Trade Organization will attempt to force those standards on the United States. This is yet another example of how the WTO threatens American sovereignty. By cooperating with Codex, the FDA is blatantly ignoring the will of Congress and the American people.