

WASHINGTON IN BRIEF

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FDA Seeks More Funds For Drug Monitoring

The Food and Drug Administration is seeking an additional \$87 million to improve drug monitoring and oversight -- a 30 percent expansion of a program under which pharmaceutical companies pay the agency to evaluate new medications. The increase will need congressional approval.

FDA officials said the increased funding will improve the approval and monitoring process and also increase the number of regulators available to monitor consumer television advertising.

Agency officials have come under fire from critics in Congress and elsewhere for not doing enough to spot and head off problems with drugs such as Vioxx. Some critics have argued that the agency would be more independent if it were funded by taxpayers.

NASA Makes Plans To Repair the Hubble

NASA has made tentative plans to launch its space shuttle repair mission to the Hubble Space Telescope in mid-September 2008, an agency spokesman said.

Responding to leaked documents that first appeared on a space news Web site, spokesman Allard Beutel said that the preliminary report was an internal document and did not mean that any formal decision on the long-awaited mission had been made.

The date reported on NASAWatch.com is Sept. 11, 2007 -- an anniversary date the Beutel said was highly unlikely to be the launch date.

Repairing and upgrading the Hubble would allow it to continue sending back data and images from deep space until its successor, the James Webb Space Telescope, is launched after 2013.

Navy Chaplain's Battle Over Prayer Concludes

The long battle between the Navy and an evangelical Protestant chaplain who accused his superiors of censoring his prayers appears to be over. Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt will be honorably, but involuntarily, discharged on Jan. 31.

A federal judge on Jan. 3 rejected Klingenschmitt's request for an injunction against the Navy. In 2004,

he was reprimanded for preaching about hell at a sailor's memorial service. He accused his commanders of religious discrimination, and he rallied support in Congress against a Navy instruction that said chaplains should offer nonsectarian prayers when addressing sailors of multiple faiths at mandatory gatherings.

He was court-martialed in September for wearing his uniform at a protest in front of the White House. But some conservative Christian groups proclaimed him a hero, and he took credit when Congress forced the Navy to rescind its prayer policy.

Panel Sought to Tackle Social Security Costs

Leaders of the Senate Budget Committee want to assemble a bipartisan panel of lawmakers and administration officials to deal with the skyrocketing costs of Social Security and other entitlement programs, with the goal of bringing a reform proposal to a vote in Congress later this year.

Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad (D-N.D.) said he and his predecessor, Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), have asked House and Senate leaders to consider appointing the panel, which would be composed of an equal number of Republican and Democratic lawmakers. They said they have also asked the White House to participate.

Conrad declined to provide many details of the panel, saying too much information could "kill this baby in the crib."

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