

Hawkeyes Eye Mercury

Iowa becomes the first state to ban thimerosal from vaccines. *By Annette Fuentes*

WITH LITTLE FANFARE or national media attention, Iowa Gov. Thomas J. Vilsack on May 14 signed into law a state ban on the use of thimerosal, a mercury preservative used in vaccines. Iowa becomes the first state in the country to ban thimerosal, which is at the center of medical and legal debates over the cause of autism disorders, now affecting as many as 1 in 250 children (See "Autism in a Needle," December 8, 2003). Similar bills are pending in the legislatures of Missouri and Nebraska, and in April, a bill to ban thimerosal was introduced in Congress.

Iowa's action opened a new

political front in a parent-led movement to establish a link between thimerosal and autism and to hold accountable pharmaceutical companies and the federal health agencies that permitted its use since the '40s. Only in 1999, after mounting scientific concerns about possible toxicity to children of mercury-laced vaccines, did the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issue a recommendation that vaccine makers remove thimerosal. The CDC still has not issued an outright ban on thimerosal, and some vaccines, including flu shots, still contain trace amounts.

"It is an important milestone

that it was passed," says Sallie Bernard, co-founder of SAFE Minds, an autism advocacy and research organization. "Once you have one state going in that direction, other states are more likely to follow along."

Iowa's anti-thimerosal action came four days before a panel of the federal advisory Institute of Medicine (IOM) issued its final report on thimerosal in vaccines. That May 18 report, which received widespread press attention, concluded that no evidence supported this conclusion. While the IOM report sought to resolve the controversy over thimerosal, Bernard says the debate is far from over. "The IOM report

makes things more difficult for us in terms of convincing the wider medical community that this is a problem," she says. "We don't want the IOM to shut down the science or the debate so the legal system doesn't have anything to work with." Bernard says many new research efforts on thimerosal and autism were under way, including some funded by SAFE Minds.

In Missouri, a thimerosal ban was approved in the House in March. But in the closing session of the Senate last month, state Sen. Ken Jacob launched a filibuster that prevented the bill from coming to a vote. According to Missouri campaign finance records, Jacob received a \$500 contribution in December 2003 from GlaxoSmithKline and \$500 from Novartis Pharmaceuticals in March 2004. Both drug companies manufacture vaccines. A similar bill banning

Three Ways to Shape a Better World With Your Investments

Domini Social Equity Fund®

offers growth opportunities through a portfolio of stocks selected for their social and environmental performance.

Domini Social Bond Fund®

provides diversification while supporting homeowners and small business owners in struggling communities.

Domini Money Market Account®

offers safety and liquidity through FDIC-insured deposits that help promote community development.

Please obtain a current prospectus for more complete information including risks, fees, and expenses, by calling 1-800-530-5321 or online at www.domini.com.



The Way You Invest Matters®

Visit www.domini.com or Call us at 1-800-530-5321

The Domini Social Equity Fund and the Domini Social Bond Fund are subject to market risks and are not insured. You may lose money. The Domini Social Bond Fund's community development investments may be unrated and carry greater credit risks than the Fund's other investments. The Domini Social Bond Fund currently holds a large percentage of its portfolio in mortgage-backed securities. During periods of falling interest rates these securities may prepay the principal due, which may lower the Fund's return by causing it to reinvest at lower interest rates. DSIL Investment Services LLC, Distributor (DSILD). 10/03

CHEAP LAUGHS AT BUSH'S EXPENSE!
SUBSCRIBE TO THE

HUMOR TIMES!

HILARIOUS
POLITICAL
CARTOONS,

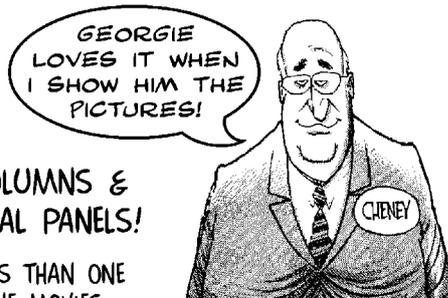
AS WELL AS
HUMOR COLUMNS &
NON-POLITICAL PANELS!

YES, FOR LESS THAN ONE
NIGHT AT THE MOVIES,
YOU CAN LAUGH ALL YEAR!

GO TO WWW.HUMORTIMES.COM OR SEND A CHECK
OR MONEY ORDER FOR ONLY \$15⁰⁰
(FOR 12 ISSUES) TO:

Humor Times
P.O.B. 162429
Sacramento,
CA 95816

ALSO... SAMPLE ISSUES CAN
BE HAD FOR MERELY \$1⁰⁰ !!!





DAVID MCNEW / GETTY IMAGES

use of mercury preservatives in vaccines was introduced in the Nebraska legislature in January 2004.

Iowa state Sen. Ken Veenstra, author of the thimerosal ban, says he saw no direct pressure from the pharmaceutical companies, but their influence was nonetheless felt in the wrangling over the thimerosal ban. “They have influence over the medical profession in general, and they have consistently sent the message, “This stuff is OK, don’t worry about it,” Veenstra says. “As a result, the people we rely on—the medical practitioners—believe the message and it’s hard to combat that notion. We had to overcome that obstacle.”

Parent activists with Biological Education for Autism Treatment in Iowa, or BEAT-Iowa, worked with Veenstra to shape the legislation. Dana Halverson, a BEAT-Iowa founder, is the parent of a 5-year-old girl who is autistic and has a range of intestinal and autoimmune disorders that Halverson believes were triggered by thimerosal in her vaccines. “The biggest problems we’ve had to go through so much financial and emotional stress—the financial stress creates so much emotional stress,” Halverson says. Last year, she and her husband incurred \$40,000 in medical expenses for their daughter, with only \$10,000 covered by insurance.

Establishing the thimerosal-autism link is the ultimate

goal of advocates because it also would affix liability for the financial and emotional burdens suffered by thousands like the Halversons. But Iowa’s ban won’t immediately change the legal playing field for those seeking compensation for their autistic children, according to Houston trial lawyer Andrew Waters. “As far as impact on litigation, it will be relatively minimal for the time being,” Waters says. “It would have more effect on a case in Iowa.” Waters filed the country’s first thimerosal lawsuit against Eli Lilly, inventor of thimerosal, and other drug companies on behalf of an autistic boy and his parents. He now represents the Halversons and many other parents. “As things stand, thimerosal hasn’t been banned by the federal government although there is evidence that some people think it’s dangerous enough to ban,” he says.

Meanwhile, on April 5, Reps. Dave Weldon (R-Fla.) and Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) introduced a bill, shaped by SAFE minds advocates, that would eliminate thimerosal from vaccines. Bernard said activists are focusing on building support in the House to make sure the bill doesn’t languish in committee. “We’re optimistic,” she says, “but a lot depends on how the issue is seen in the next couple months. ■

3.8 Natural Selection

When future generations study the short but eventful presidency of George W. Bush, they may well marvel that he left no pooch unscrewed. It may puzzle them to think that neoconservative think-tank sinecurists were considered wise and able. They certainly will be interested to know why our colonial administration turned out to be such a terrible botch.

The *Washington Post* has discovered a clue. For months, operations of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad were entrusted to a skeleton crew of bright young apple-polishers, most of whom had little training and no experience. Many bugged out after their minimum 90 days, and few left a

favorable impression on the military officers. They tended to be ideological and always seemed to regard the occupation as “a political event,” complained one Army colonel. “I wanted to pull their heads off,” disclosed an NCO.

How did this “brat pack,” as they were known, end up at the levers of power? Hell if they knew. Many received e-mails asking them to work for the CPA. One young star, the daughter of neocon kingpin Michael Ledeen, was hired without an interview or background check. She and her fellow brat-packers soon learned what they had in common: They all posted their resumes on the Web site of the Heritage Foundation.

2.2 The RNC’s Phone Wallahs

How clueless are the penny pinchers of the Republican National Committee? Clueless enough to hire some 125 telephone solicitors to shake down the party faithful—from call centers in India. The *Hindustan Times* reports that for 14 months employees of HCL BPO Services were calling American households from New Delhi to conduct issue surveys and raise money.

The company is a subsidiary of another company in turn subcontracted by a contractor of the RNC. HCL BPO would not, as a matter of policy, confirm the story, but the *Times’* sources avow that the fund-raisers worked at a billing rate of \$9.25 an hour. The paper estimates they raised at least \$10 million for the GOP before the relationship was severed last July.

An RNC spokesman characterized the story as an “urban legend” and expressed shock and hurt that the president’s enemies would propagate it.

4.8 Enlightenment at a Glance

Here’s some good news: Only 49 percent of American men in an ABC poll were cool with the practice of threatening to shoot detainees in Iraq and Afghanistan as a method of obtaining information. Wow, that means 51 percent were against or not too sure! Only 33 percent of men thought kicking and punching was OK, and a mere one in four or five were down with electric shocks, sexual humiliation and threatening relatives.

—Dave Mulcahey



Book 'em!

L.A. activists tailed, arrested on way to Liberation Weekend conference. *By Will Potter*

SEVEN POLICE CARS LINED the street, a helicopter circled overhead and seven people stood in handcuffs looking like a scene from "America's Most Wanted."

The "outlaws" were a group of activists who didn't buckle up. They claim they were targets of a law enforcement harassment campaign surrounding Liberation Weekend, a conference of grassroots activists at the University of West Los Angeles School of Law. The conference, May 15-16, drew activists to discuss "building a revolutionary movement in the United States."

Since 9/11, Bush's war on terrorism has led to an increasingly harsh crackdown on civil liberties, largely targeted at grassroots groups. Houses have been raided, activists have been followed, and, as happened last month, they have been arrested and accused of "terrorism." The arrests in California, activists say, are part of a larger, coordinated effort to silence dissent.

Melissa Rodriguez, a co-organizer of the conference, received a phone call from friends on Sunday who said they were being followed by unmarked police cars. She and a group of activists arranged to meet them. On the way, Rodriguez was pulled over by a Costa Mesa police officer accompanied by six cars and a helicopter hovering overhead.

Citing seatbelt violations, police handcuffed the bunch and led them to separate cars for interrogation.

Police searched Rodriguez's car without her consent and confiscated a guitar. They took the group to the police station, where, she says, "I kept asking



The future of dissent.

for the cuffs to be taken off, and they said, 'No you're still under arrest and there's still an investigation.' The activists were booked, fingerprinted and questioned about Rodriguez and the conference. A representative for the Costa Mesa Police Department did not return telephone calls seeking comment on the arrests.

Several police cars followed Rodriguez as she left the station to drop off the activists at their homes. At the final house, she was pulled over by an FBI agent, who questioned her about her plans for the weekend, and the political posters and propane tank police had

earlier found in her car.

"I just kept asking if I was detained, and he said 'no,' and he said they would just follow me wherever I went," she says. The small propane tank in the trunk was from a recent camping trip. The agents remained parked outside the house all night.

The seatbelt crackdown wasn't the only questionable law enforcement act during the weekend. On Saturday, Brook Hunter and a group of activists were pulled over on the way to the conference for a faulty brake light. Police asked if they were going to the conference in Los Angeles and detained them

when one passenger couldn't provide identification.

David Agranoff, an organizer with Compassion for Farm Animals, says the FBI visited his home while he was at work but his wife did not answer the door when she recognized one of the agents.

"To me this is all kind of indicative of how much they're worried about what we have to say, and how much they want to squash out dissent," he says. "That's what it's all about. They may say these are traffic violations or whatever, but it's no accident they chose to do it all that weekend."

With guns drawn, L.A. police stopped Nik Hensey on his way to the conference, and told him to put his hands in the air and step out of the car. They said his vehicle "matched a description," says Hensey. "A subordinate later indicated that I was being watched and they were told to engage me."

Hensey was taken into custody and his car was impounded and ransacked. Police opened his mail, dumped out the contents of his backpack and picked the lock on his laptop, he says.

He was followed by police to and from the conference. When he approached one of the cars that had been following him, the driver told him that he "knew my politics and that they wanted to keep me from breaking the law," Hensey says.

"I felt guilty that we might have to invade another country to sustain the fuel consumption required for seven units to tail me throughout L.A., so I encouraged them to return tomorrow with hybrid vehicles," Hensey says. "Officer Doug said he'd work on it." ■

WILL POTTER is a freelance reporter in Washington, D.C. He has written for the Chicago Tribune, Dallas Morning News and Chronicle of Higher Education.