



## Drug Industry's 'Bad-Dream' Team: Grassley and Dingell

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When drug industry lobbyists in Washington whisper about what worries them most these days, the conversation often turns to what some call an "unholy alliance" between their two loudest critics, Sen. Chuck Grassley, a conservative Republican, and Rep. John Dingell, a liberal Democrat. (That's Dingell on the left and Grassley on the right, natch.)

Despite the deep partisan divide that grips Capitol Hill on most issues, Dingell and Grassley have been pounding the FDA and the industries it regulates in hearing after hearing. The fruit of their oversight work may come next year in proposals and Dingell-driven legislation that could bring about the most significant overhaul of the FDA in a generation, the WSJ [reports](#). Changes supported by the two would give the agency lots more power to exert its will on industry.

To the Gucci Gulchers, it was downright strange when Grassley (R-Iowa) started attacking the FDA and makers of popular antidepressants (SSRI's) in early 2004. He had been among the top recipients of drug company campaign contributions. Grassley didn't care, and his office became a home away from home for a parade of FDA whistleblowers who helped him probe the influence of the industry on decision-making at the FDA. His hearings on a host of drugs have been tough on companies and FDA officials.

The 2006 elections put Grassley, who ran the Senate Finance Committee, into the minority. But the Democratic majority in House moved Dingell, D-Mich., back into a chairmanship for the first time since 1994. Dingell wasted no time firing up the oversight engines on his old Commerce Committee, and unleashed a torrent of investigations in the FDA and drugmakers.

Grassley and Dingell used to serve together in the House when it was far less partisan, and became very good friends. Before long, a Grassley-Dingell alliance took off. The two men, within the confines of the laws, have cooperated on some investigations. And Grassley even testified twice before Dingell's committee about problems with Ketek, the antibiotic made by Sanofi-Aventis, and the FDA's failure to start a criminal case on how the drug was presented to the FDA for approval. Sanofi has said it acted in good faith all along.

The two men have lauded each other in separate interviews with the Health Blog. More telling perhaps is a positive comment on the inter-committee relationship from Bart Stupak (D-Mich.), the former state trooper, who chairs Dingell's investigations panel. Stupak told us that his group and Grassley's can often piggy-back on each other's work. "He has given us cover and vice versa," Stupak said.

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