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NATIONAL

Diet pills may come under regulation

WASHINGTON (AP) — A couple whose daughter died after years of diet pill abuse asked a congressional panel Monday to push for restrictions on non-prescription weight loss drugs.

"She might have had a chance had these products been denied her as a child," said Anthony and Diana Smith, of State Center, Iowa.

Noelle Smith, 20, died a year ago of cardiac arrest after struggling since she was 14 with the eating disorder anorexia nervosa, which is an avoidance of food, and bulimia, which involves bingeing and purging.

"She was constantly sneaking diet products into the house," said Mr. Smith. "Every time we found and took from Noelle a box of diet pills, laxatives or diuretics, she would go to the corner store and buy a new supply."

Jessica McDonald, 20, of Washington, D.C., said she suffered from the same eating disorders as a teenager and regularly consumed whole boxes of non-prescription diet pills at a time.

"Even though I went to the drug store practically every day to buy pills or some other product to help me lose weight, no one ever tried to stop me or asked what I wanted the pills for," said McDonald.

She said that "at the very least there should be an age restriction to prevent young people from buying these drugs."

Vivian Hanson Meehan, president of the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, said at least one of 10 adolescents engage in dangerous eating disorders as they try to diet.

Meehan also decried the availability of diet pills.

"Diet pills containing the drug phenylpropanolamine, or PPA, pose an additional and very serious health risk to adolescents," she said.

The drug is in most of the numerous, popular non-prescription diet products used by about 10 million consumers a year. Many medical authorities say it can cause high blood pressure, kidney disease, heart muscle damage, heart rhythm abnormalities and seizures.

The Smiths, McDonald and Meehan were among witnesses testifying before the House Small Business subcommittee, which has been investigating the weight loss industry.

A report from the subcommittee staff noted a University of San Francisco study of 500

girls which showed almost half the 9-year-olds and 80 percent of those age 10 and 11 were dieting, even though just 17 percent of the group was overweight.

Chairman Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, has been after the Federal Trade Commission and the Food and Drug Administration to crack down on shady diet practices.

He said the FTC has 14 investigations under way of diet companies and diet programs.

But he criticized the FDA for being lax on enforcement.

"For almost a decade, the FDA has dawdled over regulations that would make it illegal to sell diet products containing about 100 ineffective ingredients," said Wyden.

Spotted owl in danger

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Bush administration still has no realistic plan to save the northern spotted owl, having wasted three months trying to "chart a political course around the Endangered Species Act," the Senate majority leader said Monday.

Sen. George Mitchell, D-Maine, blasted the recommendations of the White House task force on the threatened owl during a Senate floor speech, warning the proposals would be unacceptable to Congress.

He said lawmakers would have no part of the proposals to alter the Endangered Species Act or insulate timber sales from other environmental laws.

"The administration says that the plan it has developed strikes a balance between conservation and economic concerns," Mitchell said.

"But what kind of balance is there in a plan that seeks to void every major environmental law governing management of federal forest lands?" he asked.

"The administration should not respond to the alarm that has been sounded by disabling the warning mechanism. To do so would be an unforgivable dereliction of our duty to this country's natural heritage and to our descendants," the senator said.

The Cabinet-level task force, co-chaired by Agriculture

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