

***Ms. Kelly Cobb
Survivor of E. Coli Poisoning***

***Domestic Policy Subcommittee
Oversight and Government Reform Committee***

Wednesday, July 29, 2009

2154 Rayburn HOB

2:00 p.m.

“Ready-to-Eat or Not: Examining the Impact of Leafy Green Marketing Agreements”

In May 2008 I was a busy stay at home mom raising 2 children, Liberty 3, and Matthew, 1. We were visiting family in Washington from California. We were there without my husband, Matt, because he was a Marine serving for the second time in Iraq. On May 10th my mom invited me to go to a benefit dinner with her and some friends. Little did I know that by saying yes I would be changing my life forever. That night I eat a salad that was contaminated E. coli, my children, my mom, and her friends eat that same salad off different plates. I just happened to sit down at the “right plate” after what happened to me, I’m just happy that Liberty, or Matthew weren’t the one that sat there, the outcome could have been much more devastating.

On May 15th I was getting ready for my drive back to California. I went to bed that night with a stomach ache. I woke up at 0230 on May 16th with diarrhea and the most painful stomach cramps that occurred every ten minutes until my stool turned to blood at 0500. At 0630 I went to the ER at Good Samaritan Hospital, in Puyallup WA. I was sent home later that morning only to return at 1800 because I couldn't hold my medication or water down. I was admitted to Good Samaritan on May 17th because I couldn't keep anything down, I was in a lot of pain and the diarrhea had returned, and stayed there until May 21st. On May 19th I found out that I had E. coli and that was the cause of the diarrhea and pain.

When I was discharged from the hospital I was able to hold down food and water, along with my pain medicine. I woke up May 21st not feeling well and later that evening I started to vomit again; it lasted thru the night and into the morning of May 22nd. I was taken back to Good Samaritan and after a full blood work up I was told that my kidneys were only working at 50% and that they were bringing in a blood and kidney specialist in the morning. I was readmitted to Good Samaritan on May 22nd. On May 23rd the urologist (kidney doctor) told me that I would start plasma exchange, because my kidneys weren’t cycling out the toxins and that I had developed Hemolytic-uremic

syndrome (HUS). I then signed all the forms for him to insert a central line into my neck for the treatments. For the next 8 days I underwent 1 full treatment per day. I was discharged on May 30th. Over the two weeks that I spent in the hospital I had over 50 blood draws, two ultrasounds, a CAT scan (This was performed because my body wasn't recovering the way they would have liked to see), a colonoscopy, seven IVs, a central line in my neck, four units of whole blood, and 80 units of plasma (eight plasma exchanges with ten bags at a time).

I felt so many emotions over the time I was sick. Scared, hurt, angry, upset, depressed. Both my husband and father were in Iraq during that time. I had to send a Red Cross Message to Matt, to let him know what was going on and we had to wait for my dad to call to tell him. I felt horrible for having to tell them what was going on because I didn't want the fact that they were thinking about me to hurt them or one of their men. At times I didn't know if I was going to make it. I didn't know if I would get to see my kids again. Every time they walked out my room, it broke my heart. Liberty would ask me every day if it was time for me to come home and take care of her. There were times that I could hear her and Matthew crying as they walked down the hallway leaving my room. I wondered and worried everyday about who was going to be taking care of them and if I was putting too much on my mom and mother in law. My children are my world and the thought of them not being taken care of crushed me. The thought of not making it through and watching them grow up broke my heart.

My injury affected not only myself but so many people: my two children, my husband, my mother, my in-laws, my father, and my friends. Liberty had only been away from me for two nights before this and that was when I had Matthew. And Matthew, well, he had never been away from me like that. They had to go two weeks without me and even after I got home I still wasn't able to fully take care of them. The week after I got out of the hospital my aunt would come over during the day to care for me and the kids. My husband was in Iraq wondering if I was going to make it or not and who was taking care of his kids, same with my dad. My mom had to wake up at 4 am, an hour to an hour and a half before she normally would to take the kids to either my mother in law or a family friend for the day. Then after work she would pick up the kids and bring them to see me. That was the best part of my day, getting to see my babies. My son did not let me leave his sight for the first six months, not even for a shower. He was so scared that if he could not see me that I was going to leave again. My daughter still talks about bringing me her Daddy Doll while I was sick and she tells people not to be scared of the blood machine because she remembers coming and seeing me while I was getting a unit of whole blood.

My hospital stay was pure hell. I've never had a harder two weeks in my life. The pain that I felt was unbelievable. For the first few days I really wasn't sure what was going on. I remember bits and pieces of talking with the doctors. Every morning at 4 am they would come in to draw my blood and at 7 am my 3 doctors (Physician, kidney, and blood) came to talk with me. Most days were spent by myself, with nurses coming in and out of my room. I remember being so swollen at one point that I couldn't even

bend my fingers. I went from 140lbs to 180lbs. It hurt to get out of bed because I was so swollen; it felt like I was standing on pins. During my plasma exchange I would sleep to help the time go by faster; there was just something about the blood being cycled out of me that was hard for me to handle. I remember the floor I was on, lost four people the first four days I was there. I can remember thinking, "Why did they put me here, everyone around me is dying"? I couldn't shower for eight days because of the central line in my neck; I could only take sponge baths. My hair was so dirty when I left the hospital that I went to a hairdresser to have her wash my hair. When it came time to have my central line out I had to lie on my back for 30 minutes and when the nurse pulled it out it felt like I was giving birth out of my neck.

There were a lot of bad times that stand out in my mind about those two weeks. On May 23rd, when I found out that I was going to have the plasma exchange, that is when I started to think I wasn't going to make it. I remember thinking to myself that I need to talk to my mom to let her know what I wanted if I died. That I would want her to move to CA to help my kids and my husband adjust to me being gone, and so that my babies wouldn't have to go to daycare. There was one day, Wednesday, May 28th, that I was told that it was going to be four more days until I was going to get released and I just broke down. It wasn't fair to my kids that their daddy was in Iraq and that they had to be away from him and now they had to be away from me too. They didn't understand why they couldn't stay with me in the hospital and why I couldn't come home and put them to bed. I cried that whole day. Whenever anyone talked to me I just cried because I couldn't handle it anymore. I was ready to be home with my kids again. I felt like I was missing so much. My son got bigger and both of them started talking more. That same day I honestly didn't think I was going to make it. I remember getting my medicine before my plasma exchange and having such a bad reaction that I had intense chest pain and blacking out. At that point I remember holding my husband's grandmother's hand and thinking that's how I was going to die, in that hospital bed and wasn't able to say goodbye to my husband and kids. Thinking that my kids would grow up without me, with that thought I made myself open my eyes and listen to what the nurses were saying to me.

This whole thing has changed my life. I no longer eat produce that I can't wash myself. When we go out to eat at a restaurant we ask if they make their own salad or if they get it out of a bag. I wash everything from bagged salads to watermelon now. I have to go every six months to get blood draws done. As of right now I haven't been told of any future health problems. I have been told that if I get pregnant that I have to be seen right away and be much more careful about my pregnancy because of the blood issues. I can't even handle watching someone eat a salad. It makes me sick to think about. I get heartburn much easier and more intense than ever before. The time with my family means so much more to me. Thinking that I was going to die showed me that at anytime all of this can be taken away from us.

I want the party at fault to know that they took a stay at home mother away from her children for two weeks. That because of them I went through pain that no person

should ever have to go through. I would rather break bones than have the pain of e. coli again. I would ask them to really think about changing the policies about washing their product. And to think about how they would feel if it was their mother, father, daughter, son, husband or wife that was lying in that same bed as me, with all the tubes and wires that I had. That it could have just of easily been one of my children who ate that salad, that a small child could have been just as sick, if not worse, than me because of a mistake they made. I want them to know that their actions affect a lot more than just their pocket book.