

3 Lab Animal Bills May Be Reintroduced in 99th Congress

At least three of the legislative proposals involving the care and use of laboratory animals that the last Congress considered are expected to be reintroduced by their sponsors in the 99th Congress along with the possibility of an initiative seeking to ban the use of pound animals for the purposes of research and education.

The most likely laboratory animal bills to be reintroduced are:

Rep. Doug Walgren's "Alternative Research Methods."

Rep. George Brown's "Improved Standards for Laboratory Animals."

Rep. Robert Torricelli's "Information Dissemination and Research Accountability."

The Humane Society of the United States has announced its intentions of finding a sponsor to introduce a proposal that would make it a violation of federal law to release unclaimed pound animals for any reason other than pet adoption.

Of these four likely candidates for legislative consideration by the 99th Congress, the proposals by Walgren and Brown appear to have the best chance for passage during this Congress.

The last Congress did approve Walgren's proposals, which were incorporated in the bill to renew the legislative authorities of the National Institutes of Health. The bill was vetoed by the President but the Walgren amendments were not among the reasons cited by the President, who said that some of the amendments required excessive record keeping and other amendments made the bill too costly.

Brown's bill, introduced late in the second session of the 98th Congress, admittedly was a sounding board for developing a legislative proposal for consideration by this Congress.

Since 1981 Walgren has sought legislative reforms for the use of live animal models in research and has focused much of his attention in the areas of developing and utilizing alternative methods and on the local monitoring of laboratory animal care. His first bill, which failed to reach the House floor before the 97th Congress adjourned, covered a broad spectrum of requirements for all federally funded research. In the last Congress his bill was limited to animal research funded by NIH.

A question at this time is whether Walgren will again route a new proposal through the House Energy and Commerce Committee, where it could be added to the 1985 NIH renewal authorization bill and thus run the risk of another veto; or route it through the Science and Technology Committee where he is a senior member and the chairman of its Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Technology. Walgren's route selection undoubtedly will depend upon the scope and breadth of his new proposal.

Brown's proposed amendments to the Animal Welfare Act has gained support from scientific communities since its introduction last fall. By and large, the major opposition to the bill comes from the US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) which has traditionally resisted any additional requirements placed upon it through the Animal Welfare Act.

The scientific community's support for the bill is largely based upon Brown's consideration to include an amendment that would make it a federal offense to break into any federally funded research institution and steal or destroy research records, equipment, or animals. The amendment, proposed by APS during public hearings on the bill last September, has been endorsed by several national research/education groups including the American Psychological Association and the Association of American Medical Colleges.

The one common point between the Brown and Walgren bills is the requirement to establish institutional animal care committees to monitor the treatment of laboratory animals with the only difference being that the Brown bill requires APHIS inspectors to review all Committee reports during APHIS inspection. This was an APS recommendation.

The Brown bill also adds an additional standard for providing adequate exercise for laboratory animals and would establish a national clearinghouse for the exchange of research information.

The Torricelli bill also would provide a national clearinghouse for research information in addition to creating a 20-member, Presidential-appointed agency within the National Library of Medicine for the purpose of reviewing all approved-for-funding grants involving the use of animals. Those grants found to be duplicative of other grants-in-progress or research already completed would be vetoed for funding.

The proposal sponsored by Torricelli was initiated by United Action for Animals and introduced last year without input from the scientific community. However, the proposal for this Congress is expected to be somewhat modified and display some of the concerns of the scientific community including deletion of the implied veto power by the 20-member agency on those grants approved-for-funding by accepted peer-review standards.

Whereas the United Action for Animals has found a sponsor for its proposed legislation, the Humane Society of the United States is looking for a sponsor. The Society is proposing that federal animal control laws include a provision that would make it illegal to release any unclaimed pound animal to institutions for use in research or educational programs.

The Humane Society's director for laboratory animal welfare, Dr. John McArdle, has said that the Society's primary goal at this time is to put an end to all pound release of animals except for the purpose of pet adoption. The Society has been concentrating its efforts at the state and local levels but is now opening another front at the federal level. McArdle has predicted that pound release of animals will be halted nationally before 1990.

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