A Senator Reports

ANIMAL WELFARE ACT AMENDED

By Senator Lowell Weicker (Conn.)

Regardless of the lopsided votes of the Congress on this matter, it seems that for too long this legislation was a low priority item. Animal safety was too minor to bother with. The House and Senate vote totals demonstrated, however, that once the Congress was finally ready to take a stand on animal welfare, it spoke loudly and decisively.

Perhaps it is best at this time to develop a historical background of the animal welfare legislation. Beginning in 1966, with the enactment of the Federal Laboratory Animal Welfare Act, a mandate was established to insure the humane treatment of animals. It was the intent of this Act to empower the Secretary of Agriculture to establish humane standards of the treatment of animals used for research and experimentation while in scientific institutions, on the premises of animal dealers, or in transit.

Congress took this authority one step further in 1970, when they passed the Animal Welfare Act Amendments which amended the 1966 Act to include non-laboratory animals transported, bought or sold for “teaching purposes or for use as pets”. For the first time new categories of animal handlers including exhibitors (circuses, zoos, and others) and wholesale pet dealers were required to meet the humane standards of the Act’s regulations.

But as I found out in 1970 and as Rep. Thomas Foley has been trying to correct since 1964, there were glaring omissions from the 1966 Act and the 1970 Amendments that did not include the coverage of animals while they were being shipped in interstate commerce by common carriers. These loopholes allowed a large segment of the animal population that is shipped each year from being covered by any regulations insuring their protection and safe conduct while they were classified as cargo and were carried by train, truck, bus, or airline.

Congressional action to close this loophole was prompted by documentation of the problems and tragedies involved in the transportation of animals as related by pet owners, humane societies, and medical research societies. Among the problems discussed were: flimsy and inadequate shipping crates, lack of adequate care at terminal facilities, and lack of cargo handling guidelines on the care of animals.

Unfortunately, the department responsible for administering animal regulations, the Department of Agriculture, thought it best that we rely on voluntary cooperation among all groups interested in the animal transportation problem. They saw no need for legislation to correct the abuses in this area and yet did very little to support efforts to initiate the voluntary cooperation concept.

I want to take this opportunity to thank The Humane Society of the United States and all its members for their continued support of this important legislation.