The first official meeting of the 103rd Congress, on January 5, marked significant changes in Congress itself. The most new members since 1948 joined Congress: 14 senators and 112 representatives (including delegates). With a combination of fresh talent and seasoned expertise in the Congress and new Clinton administration, The HSUS is optimistic that favorable developments on our issues are possible.

One critical concern this year is the reauthorization of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), which provides the nation’s most comprehensive protection for marine mammals. The MMPA was first passed by Congress in 1972; it must be reauthorized every four years. In response to depleted marine mammal populations, the MMPA established a moratorium on the taking, harming, hunting, capturing, or killing and importation of marine mammals. Congress has held numerous procedural hearings and discussions for granting exemptions and permits were provided for scientific research and public display. Through the reauthorization process, The HSUS will work with Congress to preserve and strengthen the MMPA, especially regarding captive marine mammals.

Also due for reauthorization is the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ESA, first passed in 1973, has provided needed protections for the 1,400 endangered species, such as the brown pelican and the grey wolf. Unfortunately, the U.S. government has not complied with some ESA regulations. It has failed to develop recovery plans for almost half of all listed species, for example. (In a recent settlement of a lawsuit filed by the Fund for Animals and others, the Department of the Interior agreed to accelerate the listing process for threatened and endangered species under the ESA.)

Increased funding is essential for full implementation of the ESA. Reauthorization is likely to be extremely contentious, as environmental and economic considerations are debated. Rep. Gerry Studds is expected to introduce reauthorization legislation similar to a bill he sponsored in the previous Congress (H.R. 4045). We expect to support his approach, which would strongly promote the species conservation goals that are the aim of the Endangered Species Act.

The HSUS recently spoke with Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada regarding appropriations for the wild-horse immunocontraception program (see the article on page 5). We plan to testify before Congress on this issue and are optimistic about obtaining enough funds for full implementation of the program.

Congress will consider important new and reintroduced legislation in the coming months. The HSUS was pleased that on January 25 Rep. Gary Ackerman of New York reintroduced his legislation prohibiting the sale of "downed" animals at livestock markets (H.R. 559); Sen. Daniel Akaka of Hawaii expected to reintroduce the Senate version of the bill in February. "Downers" are animals that are too sick, weak, or crippled to walk unassisted. The HSUS testified before Congress last year on the downed animals issue and will continue to press for passage of this legislation this year.

We expect that Rep. Ben Cardin of Maryland will reintroduce the Poppy Protection Act, a proposed "lemon law" that would allow consumers to recover veterinary costs if they purchase a sick animal from a pet shop.

We are also supporting resolutions in Congress calling on the United States to cease opposing the resumption of commercial whaling. At last year’s meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), Norway announced that it intends to recommence commercial whaling, violating the international moratorium on the IWC. In 1986, the HSUS is concerned that some countries will press the international moratorium at this year’s meeting, to be held in Japan in May. The resolution states that "the United States should make the fullest use of diplomatic channels [and] appropriate domestic and international law" to advocate the conservation of whale species. It also calls upon the United States to work toward a moratorium on the direct commercial harvest of dolphins and porpoises.

HSUS/HSF has launched a campaign to discourage the importation of Norwegian fish, cheese, and petroleum products; we ask our members to use their buying power to keep Norway out of the whaling business.

Speaker of the House Thomas Foley acknowledges the oath of the House to new members of Congress in January.

"FEDERAL REPORT"

NEW CONGRESS, NEW HOPEs FOR SUCCESS

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