Statement to the Senate Committee on Commerce

by

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on behalf of

The National Society of Medical Research
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The Armed Forces Epidemiological Board

Subject: Should regulation of animal care and housing in research laboratories be carried out by the Department of Agriculture or by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare?

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Forty years of my life have been spent in research on the nature and prevention of various infectious diseases, including poliomyelitis.

Currently I am engaged in work on the possible role of viruses in human cancer. I am a member of the National Academy of Sciences, of the
Advisory Council of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and of the Armed Forces Epidemiological Board. This is the background of my familiarity with the problems of animal care and housing in research laboratories and medical schools.

The need for laboratory animals and appropriate facilities for their care is constantly increasing in proportion to the tremendous continuing increase in the number of biomedical scientists and in the number of schools that must provide our nation with an ever larger number of medical, paramedical and veterinary personnel. I stress this growing need because, in my judgment, the concern for adequate standards of housing and care for laboratory animals cannot be dealt with as something apart from provision of funds for building better facilities and for training the people to do an adequate job.

The biomedical scientists have much more reason than any other group to want maximum progress in laboratory animal care,
because they know better than anyone else how their work can be
impeded by poorly housed, poorly fed and poorly cared for animals.

The biomedical scientists are, therefore, especially appreciative of
the constructive help that their representatives in Congress can provide
in this field just as they are full of admiration for the help that the
Congress has provided in making possible the extraordinary expansion
in biomedical research during the past 25 years.

The present Committee hearing is obviously designed to permit
the Congress to be helpful in the most constructive manner. On the
specific issue on which I am now testifying the organizations, whom I
have the privilege to represent here, believe that the Department of
Agriculture is indeed the appropriate agency of government to insure
that commercial dealers in cats and dogs for use in research facilities
and schools observe prescribed standards of decent behavior. The bill
recently passed by the House of Representatives (H R 13881 introduced
by Congressman W. R. Poage) with the latest modifications contained in the Senate version (S 2322 - Committee Print No. 3) proposed by Senator Warren G. Magnuson - without, however, most of the amendments of Senator A. S. Mike Monroney - provides reasonable provisions for meeting the problem of the unscrupulous animal dealer that has justifiably aroused the anger of so many decent people in this country.

But why not most of the amendments of the Honorable Senator from Oklahoma? His motives in suggesting that the Department of Agriculture establish standards and licensure for research facilities, as well as for dealers, are undoubtedly well intentioned or else he would not have included an amendment (Sec. 16 (a)) which reads: "Nothing in this Act shall be construed as authorizing the Secretary [of Agriculture] to promulgate rules, regulations, or orders for the handling, care, treatment, or inspection of animals during actual research or experimentation
I should like to submit some of the reasons why the objectives of improved housing and care for laboratory animals that Senator Monroney wishes to achieve by his amendments are not likely to be achieved under the operating procedures he has proposed for the Department of Agriculture. One can make out a good case that the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, which because of its responsibility for funding most of the biomedical research in this country already has the most intimate relationship with most of the schools and research facilities as well as the best information regarding their varying problems, and which through many advisory groups already has the most expert knowledge of the varying needs in this field, is the proper agency for providing and enforcing the standards for adequate care of laboratory animals in research facilities. But if there were some good reason why the Department of Agriculture should handle the whole business of laboratory animals, this agency could also avail itself of the best advice.
obtainable in this country. This, therefore, cannot be the main issue.

The main issue, as I see it, is that Senator Monroney's amendments call for the establishment of certain standards which have to be fulfilled for a research facility or a school to obtain a license. And, of course, no license - no work. I would, therefore, respectfully ask Senator Monroney and this committee to consider the fact that almost one-half of the existing schools and research facilities would not be in a position to fulfill reasonable requirements, not because they are ornery or against government interference in private affairs, but because they just wouldn't have the money or the people with which to do it. A few years ago a survey by the Institute for Laboratory Animal Resources of the National Academy of Sciences indicated that about half the research facilities in this country would not be eligible for accreditation without new construction or renovation of existing facilities. I am sure Senator Monroney would not wish to stop the work of these facilities, and I doubt
that he would be opposed to helping such institutions obtain the necessary funds to make life happier not only for their laboratory animals but also for the laboratory scientists.

As this committee well knows Senator Lister Hill, at the request of the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, just introduced a bill (S 3332) - the "Laboratory Animals Act" - that is designed "to provide special assistance for the improvement of laboratory animal facilities, and to otherwise assure humane care and treatment of laboratory animals."

The organizations, which I represent here, have authorized me to say that they fully support this bill, and I hope very much that the Honorable Senator from Oklahoma and the other members of this committee may find some justice in our viewpoint. Many thanks for your efforts on behalf of the laboratory animals as well as on behalf of the dedicated scientists who use them to give us greater insight into the mysteries of life and greater power to alleviate human misery.