

The Humane Society OF THE UNITED STATES

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A Senator Reports ANIMAL WELFARE ACT AMENDED

By
Senator Lowell Weicker (Conn.)

In July of 1970, Mrs. Arthur Baum of Stamford, Connecticut, waited at Kennedy International Airport in New York for a precious package, a 10-month old German Shepherd puppy, sent by air from Chicago. She had a long wait.

Scheduled to arrive around 2 p.m. that Saturday afternoon, the flight was delayed by mechanical trouble. It never left the ground until 4 p.m. (Eastern Time) in Chicago, and arrived at 7 p.m.

The long wait was the easy part for Mrs. Baum. When her beautiful puppy arrived, he was dead—the victim of heat exhaustion and neglect. Rigor mortis had already set in. All the while the plane sat on the ground in Chicago, the poor, helpless animal remained caged in the unventilated cargo hold on board.

A veterinarian tried to reassure the woman, saying her dog was not especially unfortunate—"these reports are common and routine in hot weather", he said.

As Mrs. Baum's Congressman, she wrote me a letter with the grim details. From that day on, I promised to work to change the "common and routine" manner of treating living animals in transit.

It was a long, long fight. Today, proper safeguards for animals are finally on the books as law.

The overwhelming approval given this year by both the House of Representatives and the Senate raises questions as to why it took so long. On April 6, the House passed the conference report on this bill by a 332-31 vote. The next day the Senate in a unanimous 91-0 vote supported this measure and sent it to President Ford who signed the legislation into law on April 22.

Senator Lowell Weicker



Representative Thomas Foley



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. So what was left was a void where nothing was being done to correct the ever increasing number of abuses, injuries, and deaths of animals each year in transportation.

So enactment this April of the new Animal Welfare Act Amendments insures an effective means of ending the inhumane abuses involved with animal transportation. An equally important problem that is addressed through the law is the dehumanizing practice of animal fighting. While many states do outlaw this outrageous sport, it continues to grow and as this sport becomes increasingly interstate in nature the need of federal legislation to halt this practice became apparent.

Hopefully as this new law is enforced we will no longer hear a litany of tragedies involved with animal transportation and animal fighting ventures. This law is a major step in the direction of ending animal abuses.

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.