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.

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 runway.

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 common and routine. The 1976 Act included non-laboratory animals transported, bought or sold for "teaching purposes or for use in 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 other pet dealers) and wholesale pet dealers were required to meet the humane standards of the Act's regulations.

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.