Animals in research

Congress gears up for legislation

Washington

BIOMEDICAL researchers were warned last week that a refusal to compromise on animal welfare legislation may play into the hands of militant animal rights groups that have vowed to increase their protests in the coming months.

The warning came from Mrs Christine Stevens, president of the Animal Welfare Institute, a moderate group that does not oppose the use of animals in research but which wants tougher rules to eliminate unnecessary pain and distress. Stevens appeared along with Dr Michael DeBakey, the Texas heart surgeon, at a forum on animal care sponsored by Howard University in Washington DC. Howard University was the victim of a Christmas-night break-in by a group calling itself the "Animal Liberation Front", which stole 28 cats and then announced its achievement to the *Washington Post*. The same group stole a dog from the Naval Medical Center in Bethesda two weeks later.

DeBakey held to his position that current safeguards are adequate to prevent abuses and that new legislation would "create more obstacles to doing research". Under the existing National Institutes of Health (NIH) rules, each institution receiving NIH research funds must have an animal care committee that monitors laboratory conditions and, at some institutions, reviews experimental protocols requiring the use of animals. "You can be sure that they're doing this as well as any federally-funded policemen", DeBakey said. "The mere fact that abuses take place in a small number of cases should not overshadow the fact that most scientists want to meet the guidelines set by NIH and the animal welfare groups."

Bills are expected to be reintroduced shortly in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, taking up where last year's failed efforts left off. The cornerstone of the legislation in the eyes of the Animal Welfare Institute is a requirement that the animal committees at NIH-supported institutions be required to take on one outside, non-scientist member who would specifically represent animal interests and that the committees be required (not just advised, as now) to review experimental protocols.

Both bills are likely to drop the provisions in last year's proposals that would have required accreditation of all federally-supported research facilities by a group such as the American Association for the Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care. (Senator Robert Dole is drafting the Senate bill, Representative Doug Walgren the House bill.)

Stevens's plea for compromise comes at a time of increasingly militant action on the part of more extreme animal rights groups. An umbrella organization known as

Mobilization for Animals, which describes itself as a "direct action" group, is "targeting" four of NIH's seven regional primate centres for a protest on 24 April. Although Mobilization for Animals denies any involvement, several of the primate centres have reported attempted break-ins, apparently by animal rights groups.

The legislation may, however, be obviated by changes that NIH itself is considering in its regulations. According to Dr Robert Whitney of NIH, a draft of proposed changes "suggested a mandatory protocol review" by the institutional animal committees and the inclusion of an outside non-scientist. Whitney noted that NIH was also initiating an inspection pro-

gramme to determine how well the current system, which places the burden of responsibility for enforcement on institutions themselves, is working. The proposal has apparently been slowed down by some of the same opposition that DeBakey expressed with regard to the legislation, and is now being redrafted. Whitney emphasized that its final form has not yet been set.

DeBakey, in any event, said he was unimpressed by the argument that failing to support these changes would undercut the moderates, such as Stevens, and strengthen the extremists in the animal rights movement. "It's completely unrealistic to think that you're going to stop the antivivisectionists who want to stop all research in animals" with such legislation or new rules, he said.

Stephen Budiansky

Contraception

Djerassi calls for more research

New York

CARL DJERASSI, the Stanford chemistry professor who is known as the inventor of the contraceptive pill, continued his 15 year campaign for more research into birth control technologies last week in a memorial lecture at Rockefeller University in New York.

Djerassi decried the obstacles, which he called the "politics of contraception", standing in the way of control of the world's population growth. In his view, a range of technologies is needed, including devices for men and post-conception devices for women, in order to make birth control more acceptable in the developing world's varied societies.

One obstacle is the complacency caused by international family planning programmes in the 1970s, which lowered the rate of increase in the world's population. Djerassi is now, however, claiming that countries such as Mexico, which now has approximately 70 million people, could have 600 million people by 2050 if present trends continue.

Djerassi charged that under the Reagan Administration, the National Institutes of Health and the Agency for International Development have been cautious about funding research that might be construed as related to abortion.

Also, according to Djerassi, US manufacturers of oral contraceptives have been discouraged from developing new technologies because there are as many lawsuits filed involving oral contraceptives as there are for all other manufactured drugs combined.

Finally, the research programme Djerassi favours most, the World Health Organization's birth control programme, has been hurt by the continued refusal of the United States to give funds. The programme runs on approximately \$16 to \$20 million per year, contributed mostly by

Scandinavian countries. It is successful in part because it is international and avoids the stigma that a single nation encounters in selling so-called "genocidal" drugs to a poor country. But the foreign operations subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee has consistently blocked US contributions.

Michael D. Stein

Polish civil rights

Physicist on trial

THE opening in Warsaw last week of the trial of Dr Zbigniew Romaszewski, physicist and civil rights activist, concided neatly with the resumption in Madrid of the review conference on the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act. For, although the formal charges against Dr Romaszewski deal with his alleged work for the clandestine "Radio Solidarity" (he was described in the court record as its "head and chief organizer"), the heavy sentence initially demanded by the prosecution — eight years — suggests that his other activities were tacitly taken into account.

In particular, Dr Romaszewski compiled, on behalf of the "Workers' Defence Committee" (KOR), the chief civil rights pressure group in Poland in the pre-Solidarity era, a report on breaches in Poland of the Helsinki provisions on human and civil rights, which was submitted to the Madrid review conference in November 1980. Like many KOR members, Dr Romaszewski was later closely involved with Solidarity, serving on its National Coordinating Commission, while his wife Zofia, also a physicist, and now indicted with him on the "Radio Solidarity" charge, served on the Solidarity Warsaw Region "Intervention Bureau" which dealt with complaints of unjust treatment and victimization of workers.

Vera Rich