H.R. 3197

“Preventing Unkind and Painful Procedures and Experiments on Respected Species (PUPPERS) Act of 2017”

A bill “to amend title 38, United States Code, to prohibit the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from conducting medical research causing significant pain or distress to dogs.”

INTRODUCTION

- This legislation was introduced on 7/12/2017 by Reps. Dave Brat (R-VA) and Dina Titus (D-NV). It was subsequently referred to the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee

- Cosponsors: Representatives Nanette Diaz Barragan (D-CA), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Brendan Boyle (D-PA), Salud Carbajal (D-CA), Tony Cardenas (D-CA), Judy Chu (D-CA), David Cicilline (D-RI), Mike Coffman (D-CO), Steve Cohen (D-TN), Chris Collins (D-NY), Barbara Comstock (R-VA), Ryan Costello (R-PA), Carlos Curbelo (R-FL), Susan Davis (D-CA), Daniel Donovan (R-NY), Michael Doyle (D-PA), Ron Estes (R-KS), Matt Gaetz (R-FL), Thomas Garrett (R-VA), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), Walter Jones (R-NC), Mike Kelly (R-PA), Ro Khanna (D-CA), Ann Kuster (D-NH), Ted Lieu (D-CA), Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), Alan Lowenthal (D-CA), Brian Mast (R-FL), Martha McSally (R-AZ), Grace Napolitano (D-CA), Erik Paulsen (R-MN), Ted Poe (R-TX), Jared Polis (D-CO), Mike Quigley (D-IL), Carol Shea-Porter (D-NH), Claudia Tenney (R-NY)

- On 7/25/2017, Rep. Dave Brat submitted an amendment to the homeland security minibus, Rules Committee Print 115-30: The Defense, Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, Legislative Branch, and Energy and Water Development National Security Appropriations Act, 2018. The amendment prohibits VA funding for the following purposes: “to purchase, breed, transport, house, feed, maintain, dispose of, or experiment on dogs as part of the conduct of any study assigned to pain Category D or E.”

- The amendment was passed by voice vote in the House on 7/26/2017.

BILL SUMMARY

- The bill would amend title 38 of the United States Code to prohibit the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ use of dogs in biomedical research studies classified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as D and E studies.
  - D studies are defined by USDA as studies in which animals undergo “pain or distress” but are “appropriately relieved with anesthetics, analgesics and/or tranquilizer drugs or other methods for relieving pain or distress.”
E studies are defined as studies in which animals undergo “pain or distress or potential pain or distress that is not relieved with anesthetics, analgesics and/or tranquilizer drugs or other methods for relieving pain or distress.”

The bill states: “In carrying out research, the Secretary may not purchase, breed, transport, house, feed, maintain, dispose of, or experiment on dogs as part of the conduct of any study that causes significant pain or distress.”

**BILL ANALYSIS & IMPLICATIONS**

- This legislation was prompted by animal rights groups in a response to media coverage about an incident involving dogs at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia earlier this year. This incident was self-reported by the VA in its annual report submitted to the USDA and was corrected.

- Animal rights groups promote the legislation as a method of reducing waste to taxpayers. However, the studies at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center were privately-funded and did not involve taxpayer dollars.

- Only 85 dogs are currently involved in Category D and E studies at the VA nationwide.

- As described in the VA’s statement upon introduction of the bill, 0.05% of all animals used in biomedical research at the VA are dogs. The vast majority of the animals at the VA (approximately 99%) are rats and mice. This percentage is consistent with institutions across the country that perform biomedical research.

- Dogs are only used for vital studies in which the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) of scientific experts and members of the community confirm that a lower order species cannot be used and dogs are necessary to achieve the most accurate results. These studies at the VA play a critical role in finding treatments for diseases and conditions affecting the veteran community, including studies on cardiology, diabetes and spinal cord injuries.

- This legislation has significant and serious implications for the biomedical research community. It would end important studies that are helping find treatments for veterans, and it would effectively end the role of dogs in biomedical studies at the VA.

- Implementation of this policy would open the door to targeting of other species required by biomedical research institutions, such as cats, rabbits, rats and mice, and primates.

- Adoption of this legislation would be the first time that Congress has expressly prohibited the use of a species in research.