

**Testimony of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
(FASEB)
President Bruce R. Bistrrian, M.D., Ph.D.
Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works
“Eco-terrorism and Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty (SHAC)”
October 26, 2005**

The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of our 23 scientific society members, representing more than 65,000 biomedical research scientists. Furthermore, FASEB gratefully acknowledges the leadership role of Chairman James Inhofe in highlighting the detrimental consequences of animal rights (AR) extremism. We feel strongly that the decision by the New York Stock Exchange to halt the scheduled listing of the parent company of Huntington Life Sciences, in apparent response to pressure from AR extremists, sets a dangerous precedent that jeopardizes our progress in medical research and the quest for new therapies to treat and cure disease.

The use of animal models in biomedical research is absolutely essential to our ability to develop treatments and cures for those suffering from debilitating diseases. Breakthroughs in treatments for diabetes, heart disease, cancer, HIV / AIDS and Parkinson’s disease would not have been possible without the use of animals. Moreover, animal research directly benefits animals themselves: the majority of veterinary advances are a direct result of research involving animal models.

Members of the FASEB Societies believe that the use of animals in research and education is a privilege. This imposes a major responsibility to provide for their proper care, ethical and humane treatment. Good animal care and good science go hand-in-hand and is taken most seriously by the scientific community. In addition, FASEB feels that it

is a responsibility of researchers to communicate to the public about the role and importance of animals in research, a task made difficult due to the dangers posed by members of AR extremist groups.

The recent escalation in violence and intimidation campaigns by AR extremists directed towards researchers and their institutions is of great concern to our members. Although this hearing is focused on the actions of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), and its apparent capitulation to the AR extremist group, Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty (SHAC), biomedical researchers are often the focus of campaigns launched by groups like SHAC or the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). We would like to take this opportunity to put a human face on researchers whose lives have come under siege. These are scientists who have dedicated decades of their life in an effort to alleviate human suffering and improve human health. Moreover, these incidences are often widely reported when they take place and are counted as victories by the AR extremist movement.

In the November 22, 2002 edition of *Science* magazine¹, then FASEB President Steven Teitelbaum, MD, published an Op-Ed in response to the ongoing situation of Michael Podell, DVM. Dr. Michael Podell was an Associate Professor in the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences and Center for Retrovirus Research, College of Veterinary Medicine at the Ohio State University (OSU). He studied the effect of methamphetamine abuse on the progression of immunodeficiency virus, known in humans as HIV, the causative agent of AIDS, as well as the neurological effects of HIV, a poorly understood aspect of the disease. Podell's investigation involved the use of feline models, because his previous research had discovered that feline

¹ Teitelbaum, S. (2002, Nov. 22) *Science*. 298:1515.

immunodeficiency virus (FIV) closely mirrors the neurodegenerative effects of HIV infection in humans, making cats an excellent surrogate for HIV neuropathology. This research was uncovering tantalizing new evidence about the effects of methamphetamine use on viral replication. Podell's findings, published in the *Journal of NeuroVirology*, plainly showed a manifold increase in neural cells' ability to replicate FIV after methamphetamine treatment. The OSU study also shed light on the mechanism by which FIV associates with astrocytes, mutating into a strain of virus that does not depend on immune system interaction for replication. This important piece in the puzzle of how the viral load of FIV/HIV in the brain leads to dementia is vital to efforts to lessen this debilitating brain damage. However, before these findings were published, Dr. Podell abandoned his research, walking away from a \$1.68 million dollar grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the sort of funding only one in five researchers might successfully apply for.

Why did Michael Podell, a promising and successful scientist who was contributing invaluable knowledge to the fight against AIDS, leave his career as a research scientist? From the awarding of the grant in October, 2000, Dr. Podell, his family, and Ohio State University were subjected to an intense and often violent campaign of harassment. According to interviews with Dr. Podell², he received thousands of harassing emails and a dozen death threats. The university itself was subjected to repeated acts of vandalism. Ultimately, it was concern for the safety of his family, who were also being threatened, that played a large part in convincing Michael Podell to leave. In one threatening letter they received, a newspaper picture of a United

² Davis, S. (2002, August 1) *DVM Newsmagazine*.

Kingdom scientist whose car had been bombed by AR extremists was scrawled with the message “You’re next.”³

Sadly, this is not an uncommon story: throughout the US and UK, law-abiding biomedical researchers are being targeted. Although these groups have sought cover under the fact that no US researcher has been physically harmed or directly targeted for physical violence, this is not true in the UK. Human targets of groups like SHAC and ALF in Europe have been beaten, branded, attacked with caustic substances, and firebombed⁴. The roots of the US movement of AR extremism are in the UK. FASEB feels it is only a matter of time before these domestic campaigns escalate to the violent intensity of their UK counterparts. We fear that the NYSE’s action will embolden these groups to increase their violent efforts to halt the use of animals in research.

Research institutions, funded in large part by taxpayer dollars, are also victims of AR extremism. In the last hearing on this topic held by this committee, you examined the damage done during the November, 2004 attack at the University of Iowa, which caused \$450,000 worth of damage to laboratories and equipment. Again, this is not an uncommon story: Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge was spared the wrath of Hurricane Katrina, but has been attacked multiple times by ALF⁵, most recently in April, 2005⁶. On ALF’s website, where the attack against LSU is triumphantly detailed, there is an ominous message to researchers, “Stop now, or be stopped.”⁷ Money that

³ Stolberg, SG (2002, July 23) *New York Times*. P. A1

⁴ Bhattacharya, S. (2004, April 22) *The New Scientist*. Retrieved 2005, Oct. 25 from: <http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn4913>

⁵ McElfresh, A. (2004, Jan. 30) *The Reveille (LSU)*. Retrieved 2005, Oct. 25 from: <http://www.lsureveille.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2004/01/30/4019fdcb1286>

⁶ Smallwood, S. (2005, Aug. 5) *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 51(48). P. A8.

⁷ Animal Liberation Front. Retrieved 2005, Oct. 25 from: http://www.animalliberationfront.com/ALFront/Actions-USA/LSU_Rat_Lib_05.htm

could be going towards life-saving medical research is now being spent on increased security and cleaning up the damage caused by AR extremists.

But the monetary damages done to laboratories and research institutions, (documented by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, and the Foundation for Biomedical Research), do not fully convey the impact of direct actions by ALF and SHAC. The loss of computer files, lab animals, research notebooks or microscope slides may not account for a great monetary loss, but could represent years of work in the life of a scientist or graduate student. Imagine working long hours on a small stipend, following your heart's passion through the sometimes frustrating process of bench research for five years, trying to achieve a doctoral degree, only to have all of that work eliminated in one night by a group whose public website describes in great detail exactly how to attack and harm research laboratories. The human toll of having one's research lab targeted by AR extremists is described eloquently in a [Washington Post editorial](#) (July 17, 2005) written by Dr. Mark Blumberg, a researcher at the University of Iowa, which we have attached.

Animal rights extremists have become a serious impediment to the progress of biomedical research, as well as to the peace of mind of scientists themselves. FASEB understands that the committee is addressing the broader topic of eco-terrorism, of which AR extremism is only one part. However, we urge the committee to carefully examine the toll of AR extremism on the scientific community and our medical research enterprise, the results of which are an insidious stifling effect on the discovery of new cures for diseases. Biomedical researchers are dedicated to improving the health, well-

being and productivity of all people. They should be allowed to do so in safety and security. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for shedding light on this critical issue. FASEB stands ready to assist in any way possible.