

Statement by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell

Subcommittee on
Consumer Affairs, Foreign Commerce and Tourism
April 4, 2001

Thank you Mr. Chairman for calling this important hearing on Mad Cow Disease and for allowing me the opportunity to testify on an issue that has a direct impact on my home state of Colorado, and the rest of the nation as a whole.

Let me state right up front – the purpose of this hearing should not be to whip up peoples' fears so they go off pell mell in a stampede of hysteria.

Rather, we need to proceed in a prudent, cautious way to do everything we can to prevent Mad Cow Disease and other devastating livestock diseases from entering and spreading in the United States. Only then can we ensure continued consumer confidence in the safety of the American food supply.

History has taught us that inaccurate or insufficient information leads to destructive rumors. History has also taught us that the public's perception of inadequate government responses to the public's concerns can lead to groundless fears.

Regrettably, there are extremists in our country who are deliberately whipping up needless fears. While we are working here today to reassure the American people about the safety of their food supply, the head of PETA – the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals – is openly stating her hopes that Foot-and-Mouth disease spreads to the United States!

Ingrid Newkirk, PETA's President, said in an interview, and I quote: "If that hideousness came here, it wouldn't be any more hideous for the animals – they are all bound for a ghastly death anyway. But it would wake up consumers." She went on: "I openly hope that it comes here. It will bring economic harm only for those who profit from giving people heart attacks and giving

animals a concentration camp-like existence. It would be good for animals, good for human health and good for the environment."

That is why this hearing is important – to nip these destructive rumors and fears in the bud with accurate information and decisive action.

The American people have already expressed their concern about Mad Cow disease. According to an ABC News - Washington Post poll conducted this January, 44 percent of respondents who had heard of the disease said they were 'very concerned' or 'moderately concerned' that it would become a problem in the United States. This percentage increased to 65 percent in those

responding to a similar question in a Gallup poll.

These poll numbers make it clear that the Congress cannot simply stick its head in the sand like an ostrich and pretend that the public is not concerned.

As a rancher myself, and having heard from fellow cattlemen, I have personal as well as policy concerns about Mad Cow Disease. Colorado is home to 12,000 beef producers and 3.15 million head of cattle. Let me emphasize that number – 3.15 million head of cattle – more than the human population in 22 of our states.

Nationwide, Colorado ranks 4th in cattle on feed and 10th in overall cattle numbers. Nearly one-third of

Colorado counties are classified as either economically dependent on the cattle industry or the industry plays a vital role in their economies. Many counties across the country are also dependent on the cattle industry.

Therefore, it is critical that we in Congress do everything we can to protect this industry in Colorado and nationwide.

What we are seeing overseas is the rapid spread of three categories of diseases.

The first category is Mad Cow Disease, which is the focus of this hearing. Even if the infected animal is destroyed, the disease can spread through the distribution of contaminated cattle feed.

A particularly disturbing aspect of Mad Cow Disease is that it can spread to humans. Close to a hundred people in Europe already have been inflicted with Mad Cow, which is debilitating and incurable.

So far, Mad Cow has not been found in the United States. But, we have had some recent scares. Just two weeks ago, a herd of quarantined sheep in Vermont was seized by USDA because it was feared the herd was infected with Mad Cow. The sheep had come from Belgium three years ago and might have been fed contaminated feed.

Two days later, a second herd of quarantined sheep in Vermont was seized and killed and also tested for Mad

Cow Disease. Then, a week ago a herd of cattle was killed in Texas for fear of being infected with Mad Cow Disease.

These three recent scares in the United States are warning signs calling for action.

The second category outside the scope of today's hearing is Foot-and-Mouth Disease. Animals which are inflicted with Foot-and-Mouth are cows, sheep, goats, pigs, and other cloven-hoofed animals like elk and deer. While it does not affect humans directly, its spread is devastating.

Just look at how out of control it is in England and how it has spread to the European Continent. The first

outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease in England was just six weeks ago. Today, the entire country is under quarantine. And, in the past three weeks, there have been confirmed cases of the disease in France, Ireland, and Northern Ireland.

Fortunately for the United States, the last incidence of Foot-and-Mouth Disease was in 1929. But, with the ease and speed of how viruses travel with all of our modern transportation systems, a recurrence in the United States may not be far away. In fact, just a few days ago, a hog was suspected of Foot-and-Mouth Disease in North Carolina.

The third category includes related livestock diseases. One such disease is known as Chronic

Wasting Disease which infects the brain and central nervous system and causes Elk and Deer to lose massive amounts of weight which leads to death.

Just two days ago, wildlife officials began killing 300 deer in Northeastern Colorado to control the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease.

I am a realist. Congress must do everything it can to protect our food supply against all three categories of livestock diseases.

Last Friday at the Chicago Board of Trade, the markets for livestock and grain dropped significantly because of rumors, and let me emphasize **rumors**, about

a livestock related disease in North Carolina. This is exactly what we need to avoid.

And, we can see this need at the state level and in the private sector. Some states will not wait for the Federal Government to do more to prevent the influx of Mad Cow Disease. Colorado along with North Dakota and Montana have issued emergency directives that impose their own restrictions -- such as increasing the kinds of animals banned or requiring disinfecting baths for certain animals.

My state went further by broadening the ban to include horses and companion animals, such as cats and dogs, which are not covered by the federal ban. The

Colorado restriction will stay in effect until the country which the animals originated from are free of the disease for six months.

The private sector also is taking important steps. Recent news reports indicate that Burger King and McDonald's are requiring meat packers to prove that the cattle they buy have not been fed feed containing animal byproducts.

I think the states and the private sector are on the right track. Now, we at the federal level need to provide them more support and be more protective of our food

supply which is still the safest in the world.

If Foot-and-Mouth disease reaches America's shores, and is allowed to establish a foothold, we should not be surprised if our beef, pork and lamb industries are reduced to mincemeat in short order. We should thank our ranchers and farmers for this and need to make sure they are not forced into seeing hard times due to these diseases.

That is why I introduced S. 534 on March 14, 2001 which establishes a Federal Interagency Task Force, to be chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture, for the

purpose of coordinating actions to prevent the outbreak of the three categories I mentioned earlier: Mad Cow Disease, Foot-and-Mouth Disease and related diseases like chronic wasting.

The agencies in the Task Force will include Agriculture, Commerce, Health and Human Services, Treasury, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, Customs, and any other agencies the President deems appropriate.

Currently, APHIS – the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service – is working with various federal agencies, like Customs, CDC, HHS, and NIH. My bill

would expand this federal effort, formalize the creation of a Task Force, and increase the impact of federal efforts through better coordination.

My bill also requires that, no later than 60 days after the enactment of S.534, the Task Force would submit to Congress a report which will describe the actions the agencies are taking and plan to take to prevent the spread of Mad Cow and make recommendations for the future prevention of the spread of these diseases to the United States.

I look forward to working with this Committee and the Senate on implementing new protections against the spread of Mad Cow Disease and related livestock

diseases.

These diseases do not simply threaten the safety of our food supply. These diseases also threaten the Western way of life.

Mr. Chairman, I ask Unanimous Consent that some news clips and a chronology my office prepared be made a part of the Record.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.