

Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman

February 27, 2002

I commend Congressman Sherrod Brown and Congresswoman Louise Slaughter for introducing the Preservation of Antibiotics for Human Treatment Act of 2002. I am pleased to be part of this important effort to address a major cause of antibiotic resistance - the inappropriate use of antibiotics in farm animals.

Antibiotic resistance caused by overuse of antibiotics in food animals poses a serious and growing threat to human health. More and more doctors are faced with patients suffering from potentially life-threatening infections that do not respond to antibiotic treatment. Everyone who becomes ill with these resistant bacteria is at risk.

Studies indicate that the number of antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria is growing at a disturbing rate. Vulnerable groups, such as children and the elderly, are at special risk from antibiotic-resistant strains of food-borne bacteria like salmonella.

Legislative action to address this critical public health problem is long overdue. The bill we are introducing today will ensure that antibiotics that have important uses in humans are not routinely given to healthy animals unless there is good evidence it will not endanger human health.

This bill focuses particular attention on antibiotics used in animals that are closely related to antibiotics used in people. Possibly the evidence will show that not every one of these antibiotics causes a problem. The bill gives the manufacturers two years to make their case that the use of specific antibiotics in animals does not pose a risk to human health. If adequate evidence of safety is presented, an antibiotic may continue to be used in animals. Absent such evidence, the approvals will then be withdrawn for use in healthy animals. However, there is no reason why we cannot see improvements in public health immediately. Those businesses that currently purchase and distribute excessive amounts of antibiotics to animals should reexamine their practices.

Today, we are also sending letters to the nation's 20 top poultry producers to survey their use of antibiotics. Obtaining this information will be useful in better understanding the scope of this pressing public health problem.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on passing this legislation to stop overuse of antibiotics and to improve the public health. This legislation we are introducing today will take an important step. I am proud to join this effort and commend my colleagues for their commitment to addressing this important issue.