

May 25, 2006

Honorable Howard Coble
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3306

Mr. Chairman:

This is a response to written testimony to the subcommittee submitted by Dr. Michele Basso PhD. Assistant Professor, Department of Physiology, University of Wisconsin and an affiliate of the National Institutes of Health's Wisconsin National Primate Research Center (WPRC). She provided oral testimony to the subcommittee on May 23, 2006.

I am the cofounder of the Primate Freedom Project and a member of the Board of Directors of the Alliance for Animals, the two organizations misrepresented by Dr. Basso.

Dr. Basso's testimony was riddled with falsehoods, misrepresentations, and much obvious confusion.

1. Dr. Basso testified: "I work together with neurologists and neurosurgeons across the country who treat Parkinson's patients with state of the art surgical therapies. In the laboratory, we use non human primates to understand the mechanisms of action of these therapies in order to improve them."

Dr. Basso has published twenty scientific papers since 1993 (a bibliography is attached.) Her research has resulted in no progress in the treatment of movement disorders such as Parkinson's disease. None.

Dr. Basso's publications have little to do with the improvement of current therapies; her experiments on rats and monkeys – the overwhelming bulk of her research – are basic science. Her research has focused primarily on eye movement and blinking in rhesus monkeys and rats. We believe that her claims concerning Parkinson's disease are rooted in her continuing effort to win NIH grants. Her claim that she works closely with clinical doctors is not reflected in her publications.

2. Dr. Basso testified: "[O]ur work on non human primates together with our work on humans will improve the quality of life of patients suffering from movement disorders such as Parkinson's disease."

Since Dr. Basso's research has never resulted in an improvement in the quality of life for persons suffering with a movement disorder or their treatment, her claim that her work will improve their lives is pure speculation and perhaps even fraudulent given that public funds are awarded to her based on similar claims.

3. Dr Basso testified: "About 3 years ago, an FBI agent opened a case for me because I received an email from an unknown source calling me an animal killer and equating me with Dr. Mengele, the war criminal who tortured humans during the Nazi era.... Since then, animal rights activists have been active on campus."

It is a shocking misuse of public funds if, as Dr. Basso claims, an anonymous disparaging email results in the FBI "opening a case." Dr. Basso seems to feel that animal rights activism began at the University of Wisconsin three years ago. In fact, in April 1983, four thousand people marched in protest of experiments occurring at WPRC. (See: "4000 rally against animal cruelty." *The Capital Times*. April 25, 1983.) Protest has been on-going.

4. Dr. Basso testified: "[T]he Wisconsin Alliance for Animals and the Primate Freedom Group rented, with an option to purchase, a piece of property immediately adjacent to the two primate centers - The Harlow Lab and the WRPC."

Neither the Alliance for Animals nor the Primate Freedom Project ever rented the property to which Dr. Basso refers.

5. Dr. Basso testified: "The groups referred to the building as the upcoming "Holocaust Museum" designed to remember the monkeys killed by researchers at the two primate centers."

Please see The National Primate Research Exhibition Hall website at <http://www.primateresearch.com>.

6. Dr. Basso testified: "[S]ome time around September 2005, a monthly meeting, held on the University campus called "Primate Vivisection from A to Z" began. Since the University is committed to the free speech rights of all members of the community, the Wisconsin Alliance for Animals and the Primate Freedom Group were granted access to University property and facilities for these meetings."

Neither the Alliance for Animals nor the Primate Freedom Project have been granted access to university property. The meetings referred to by Dr. Basso are sponsored by an official university student group, the Madison Coalition for Animal Rights (MCAR.)

7. Dr. Basso testified: "The animal rights protest consisted of a truck with a video screen on three sides. The screens displayed images of non human primates in cages."

The video displayed was primarily from a recent undercover video that led to USDA fines against a contract primate laboratory. See <http://www.covancecruelty.com/>

8. Dr. Basso testified: "The protestors would run to the front door, ring the bell and run away."

The front door bell was rung, and if the researcher came to the door they were asked to come outside and discuss their research with us. No one "ran away." The truck was

parked in front of the house and protesters stood on the sidewalk with signs. The protests were a legal exercise of the First Amendment.

9. Dr. Basso testified: “Over the course of one week, they attended the homes of 7 of the 8 people, the two primate center directors, one academic staff and 4 scientists. 5 of these 7 people directly targeted were female. Of the 51 non-human primate investigators on campus, only 11 of these are women.”

Dr. Basso implies that the protesters or the organizers of the protests are misogynists or see women as particularly vulnerable. But, we had detailed information about two of the women researcher’s work because we had been presenting public lectures on the research occurring on campus by proceeding alphabetically through the researchers’ names. Dr. Basso’s and Dr. Benca’s research had been examined in detail.

Dr. Terasawa’s research had come to our attention because the USDA had recently discovered that her lab had been violating the Animal Welfare Act. Dr. Schneider’s research had come to our attention because her lab assistant of six years had recently been forced out of her job for voicing her concerns over the welfare of the monkeys in her lab. Jordana Lenon is the WPRC public information officer who had been writing libelous emails to local public officials implying that people concerned about the monkeys were guilty of enticing minors to violate the law.

10. Dr. Basso testified: “The activists attempted to go to my home but made a mistake and protested in front of the wrong house.”

This is misleading. Dr. Basso had apparently just recently separated with her domestic partner who apparently still lived in the house. All public records still listed the address as that of Dr. Basso.

11. Dr. Basso claims that she has received anonymous phone calls and subscriptions to magazines and to book clubs that she did not order. We have no knowledge of this. Information about Dr. Basso’s work has been disseminated through various web sites. The number of people who might have learned about her work could be considerable.

12. Dr. Basso testified: “It is critical to point out that biomedical research is subject to very strict regulations and oversight.”

The only people who make such claims are those who have financial interests in the system. Knowledgeable parties without such interests uniformly observe that the oversight system is ineffective. See for instance the USDA Inspector General’s 2005 audit report of the federal oversight system at <http://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/33002-03-SF.pdf>.

13. Dr. Basso testified: “We have an animal care and use committee for each school at Madison and an all campus committee that oversees all schools. My research meets or

exceeds all standards set by the USDA, Public Health Service Policy as well as local guidelines for the care and use of non human primates in research.”

In fact, the local oversight system referred to by Dr. Basso is directly responsible for approving the studies that recent USDA inspections discovered to be in violation of federal regulations. In one case, the studies had been going on for seventeen years. Given that the oversight committees officially assert that all research is in compliance with all federal regulations, in light of the recently discovered violations, Dr. Basso’s claims mean little.

14. Dr. Basso testified: “We abide by the well-known 3R principle concerning the use of animals. Whenever we can, we reduce the numbers of animals used, we replace the animal model with some other or we refine the technique we use to ensure maximal well-being of the animals.”

A review of documents recently submitted to the USDA by the university suggests that over one thousand monkeys may be individually housed at WPRC. The university has consistently refused to comment on these documents. Individual housing is a known cause of self-mutilation in rhesus monkeys, the primary species used at WPRC. Dr. Basso’s assertions concerning the institution’s concerns for the monkeys’ well-being should be dismissed as mere propaganda in light of the housing methods and the realities of the harm done to the monkeys in the labs. Her claim is ludicrous.

15. Dr. Basso testified that: “Working on animals is a privilege that neither I, nor my colleagues take lightly.”

On the contrary, the treatment of the animals in the labs as described by previous employees suggests very strongly that the animals are treated with little respect. A privilege is a special advantage, immunity, permission, right, or benefit granted to or enjoyed by an individual, a class, or a caste. In this case, ‘immunity’ seems to best fit the meaning of ‘privilege’ as used by the primate researchers. They seem to feel themselves immune from public sentiment or desire. They seem to feel themselves immune from normal societal mores; if the public were allowed to see what actually goes on in the primate labs and understood the justifications and dollars spent, this ‘privilege’ would be withdrawn immediately.

During Dr. Basso’s testimony, she voiced her opinion that she has the right to live free from fear. She seems to be referring to a fear of the public’s outrage. No one living off the public’s largess has this particular right. Her use of the term ‘fear’ seems oddly at odds with the fear experienced by the monkeys in the labs. Her work is a dead-end; it consumes millions in tax dollars; it creates much fear and pain.

In her oral answers to the subcommittee’s questions, Dr. Basso claimed that she believes that young scientists could be dissuaded from entering her field and that she has even considered abandoning her work as well due to her fear of activists’ actions. This is a difficult claim to reconcile with her lab’s website. Why would someone who claims to be

so worried about animal rights activism, who, she claims, spends inordinate amounts of time on security measures for her lab, post the pictures and names of her laboratory staff on the internet? See: <http://www.physiology.wisc.edu/mblab/>

We are gravely concerned that our compassion, concern, and efforts on behalf of the monkeys are being twisted into some distorted concept of terrorism. The notion that an unwanted magazine subscription is somehow akin to flying a plane full of passengers into a fully occupied skyscraper is an Orwellian absurdity. We urge you to consider Dr. Basso's testimony in the context of her self-interest in casting her critics in the most unfavorable light possible.

Sincerely,

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Cc:

Hon. Robert C. Scott
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Hon. William D. Delahunt
Hon. Tom Feeney
Hon. Jeff Flake
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Hon. Mark Green
Hon. Ric Keller
Hon. Sheila Jackson Lee
Hon. Daniel E. Lungren
Hon. Martin T. Meehan
Hon. Mike Pence
Hon. Maxine Waters
Hon. Anthony D. Weiner

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