Reading:
- *The Jungle and the Debate over Federal Meat Inspection in 1906* (HBS Case No. 716-045)


In early June 1906, the House Committee on Agriculture heard testimony from two investigators appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt to verify allegations of unsanitary conditions at Chicago slaughterhouses that had appeared in Upton Sinclair’s recent novel, *The Jungle*. Although the investigators confirmed many of Sinclair’s assertions, members of the Agriculture Committee proved skeptical, challenging the investigators on numerous details. The hearing was part of a two-month congressional debate over possible meat inspection legislation, brought about by an unusual alliance between Roosevelt and Sinclair.

After extensive and often heated communications between the House, Senate, and White House, a new meat inspection bill, not yet passed by either the House or the Senate, arrived on the president’s desk for his preliminary review on June 18, 1906. It was a compromise of sorts—a mixture of ideas from all sides that had grown out of a series of proposals and counterproposals through May and June. The bill, crafted by members of the House Agriculture Committee, satisfied the president in some respects. In particular, it mandated inspection of meat products transported across state lines. Yet it also lacked provisions that Roosevelt favored, including dating of canned meats and fees on meatpackers to fund the inspections. Although the bill was hardly ideal from Roosevelt’s perspective, he very much wanted to secure a statute before Congress adjourned only twelve days later. If he insisted on further negotiations, the momentum for a law spurred by *The Jungle* might dissipate, derailing the entire effort. However, if he endorsed the compromise bill, he would have to sell it to reformers in the Senate who were insisting on stricter legislation. With the congressional session rapidly winding down, Roosevelt had to decide whether to send the bill back to Capitol Hill with his blessing, or reject it and hope for something better.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Was a federal meat inspection law necessary in 1906? Why or why not? (If yes, what provisions would you have deemed most necessary?)

2. After reading George Stigler’s characterization of regulatory capture (reprinted in Appendix II of the case), do you believe the bill that arrived on President Roosevelt’s desk on June 18 had been captured by industry interests? If so, why and to what extent? If not, why not? More broadly, does Stigler’s model accurately characterize the political dynamic(s) at play in this case? Please think especially carefully about these questions, since they are likely to be a major focus of the discussion.

3. What should President Roosevelt do on June 18, 1906? Should he accept the revised bill from the House Agriculture Committee and try to sell it to skeptics in the Senate, or should he send it back to the House and insist on further revisions and negotiations?