In 1980, fewer than 4% of the approximately 28,000 patents held by the federal government were licensed to industry to develop commercial products.

Identify a Problem

The technology transfer manager at a large research university informed Senator Birch Bayh that the university found several important discoveries that couldn’t be patented due to inconsistent government rules and red tape.

Petition Elected Officials

As chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution, Senator Bayh held hearings regarding patent laws.

Congress Investigates

Senator Bayh and Senator Bob Dole drafted the University and Small Business Patent Procedure Act to make publicly funded discoveries patentable and commercialized. This later became known as the Bayh-Dole Act.

Congresspeople Draft a Bill

The 96th Congress debated the Bayh-Dole Act, along with two competing bills. After multiple votes in both House and Senate, Congress passed this legislation in 1980.

Congress Votes

The Bayh-Dole Act sparked commercialization of discoveries made in publicly funded laboratories. By 2002, there were 15 times more university patents than before the Bayh-Dole Act. The law is credited with the explosive growth of the biotechnology industry, leading to new drugs and treatments of diseases.

Effects