

My Letters with Wayne

From the No Kill Blog (April 14, 2009)

I have been accused of not willing to work with others and only criticizing. I find this quite ironic since I've worked with a number of organizations, including many originally high kill rate animal control shelters which now have some of the highest save rates in the nation. I've worked with county commissions, county councils, city councils, and mayors. I've worked with feral cat groups, advocacy organizations, and private humane societies. And I've even tried to work with Wayne Pacelle, to encourage HSUS to get out of this vicious cycle they are in which I previously described as follows :

1. There is a scandal in a shelter involving unnecessary killing (such as Tangipahoa Parish, LA or Wilkes County, NC) or animal lovers go public in their effort to reform their shelter (Fix Austin, Fix San Francisco, Coalition for a No Kill King County);
2. HSUS defends or legitimizes the regressive shelter, undermining the efforts of animal lovers in that community;
3. No Kill advocates publicly condemn HSUS;
4. HSUS defends its actions, asks for a meeting which fails to result in comprehensive, substantive, and permanent reforms, or issues a vague statement only to violate its dictates at the next available opportunity;
5. The whole process starts again.

On December 15, 2008, I sent the following olive branch to Pacelle, asking to meet with him in the hopes that we could work together:

Dear Wayne,

[Your recent language in a Maddie's Fund written adoption campaign announcement \[embracing No Kill\] is like nothing that has ever come out of HSUS on the companion animal issue.](#) It is my most fervent hope that it will signal a permanent shift away from HSUS' historical statements and positions on sheltering. In order to increase the likelihood of an HSUS firmly committed to and supportive of the No Kill philosophy, my hope is that HSUS and I can cooperatively work together and create a mechanism that allows the HSUS to speak positively with—as opposed to against—reform minded activists seeking to modernize their community shelters. Specifically, my hope is that before HSUS or I respond to the many sheltering hotspots around the country—at the next Tangipahoa, LA or Eugene, OR or King County, WA—we can develop a procedure/mechanism to work together and speak for reforms in as united a voice as possible. Because I do not have the resources of HSUS, what I propose is that you and I meet in the San Francisco area in a neutral location (a hotel meeting room?) with a third party that we both trust as a mediator or facilitator to begin a process of dialog/mediation...

And after a couple of e-mails back and forth—and after the [Wilkes County massacre](#) which followed a few months after his recent language should have prevented it—Pacelle told me to basically shut up and let HSUS continue to promote killing if I wanted to get along. He wrote:

I indicated I'd agree to meet, after receiving your letter. But I've reconsidered now in light of your actions last week...

So what were my actions? I responded to Pacelle as follows:

In referring to “my actions last week,” I assume you are referring to the [hearing in San Francisco over our shelter reform legislation](#), which is a chief aim of the No Kill Advocacy Center. As you may know, I have long been involved in San Francisco and it was you who interfered in the effort to save lives there. Since you attempted to derail that effort, I had no choice but to respond to your allegations. If anything, it is I who should be complaining to you since you intentionally inserted yourself in my effort to bring the No Kill goal back to San Francisco. But I did not use that as an excuse not to meet, because that is the whole purpose of the meeting. We are far apart. This movement is crying out for reform and I have long stated that I would be the first to line up behind HSUS if it embraced, rather than undermined, the No Kill movement. Why not pursue that? Why not work toward an agreement so that HSUS would not consistently undermine lifesaving efforts by supporting actions that attempt to stall progress towards No Kill policies, such as Tangipahoa, Wilkes County, San Francisco, and other places.

Saying I will not work with people is also ironic because that is what my overture to Pacelle was—an attempt to work together—only to be rebuffed. In fact, that was not the first time I had written to Pacelle. I have been writing to Pacelle for *fifteen years*—starting when I was a law student and the Fund For Animals, his organization, was supporting legislation to kill feral cats—in the hopes that he would change policies he was advocating which favored killing.

Until the above e-mail communication, I have never once had the courtesy of a reply. What am I to do but to conclude that he isn’t interested in change? What choice has he ever left me but to challenge him publicly? It is not and never has been me that has refused to engage in constructive dialog. And still I reached out to him again.

I contacted Pacelle again the morning of the Las Vegas meeting giving him our hopes for [a sustainable and comprehensive Pit Bull policy](#) that was fair to the dogs, maximized lifesaving, while being cognizant of public safety. And once again, there was no reply.