

Dubious Deals at HSUS

From the No Kill Blog Tuesday, September 16, 2008

Put an **END** to ANIMAL FIGHTING



Yes! I want to make a special gift to help The Humane Society of the United States care for the dogs seized in the Michael Vick case and to support other vital animal protection programs.

The HSUS has assisted federal authorities in the case against Michael Vick and his co-defendants, and is now overseeing the care of the 52 pit bulls seized from Vick's property in southwestern Virginia.

We desperately need your help to care for these dogs while the case is pending. Please donate today by completing the fields below. **Your gift will be put to use right away to care for these dogs and to support all our vital animal protection programs.** Thank you!



This dog was one of 52 pit bulls seized from Michael Vick's property -- dogs now being cared for by The HSUS in cooperation with shelters. ©The HSUS

While Gulf State shelter [Tangipahoa Parish](#) continues to kill animals, it will soon do so [in a room built to kill animals paid for by the Humane Society of the United States](#). The nearly \$30,000 price tag for the kill room will be paid for with monies HSUS raised ostensibly to help the animals of Hurricane Katrina years ago (an estimated \$20 million of which is still unspent, not including interest and investment dividends).

Not only did HSUS provide political cover for the killing, not only did HSUS chief Wayne Pacelle deceive the public into falsely believing that there is "[a new dawn](#)" for the animals of Tangipahoa (which will never arise for over 170 of them because they are DEAD), his HSUS is paying for a room to kill even more of them.

If that is not enough, MuttShack Rescue recently completed a large-scale rescue of animals in Louisiana because of Hurricane Gustav. Instead of supporting the effort, HSUS claimed the rescue as their own. According to MuttShack: "[We] just completed the largest animal

evacuation in the history of New Orleans. After its completion, HSUS drove their trucks up in front of the whole deal, shot some footage and has posted it [on their website] as their own rescue."

Still sitting on over \$20 million dollars of unspent funds from Hurricane Katrina, using money earmarked to save the lives of animals to build rooms to kill them, HSUS then fundraises off of the success of others; and in doing so, diverts funds meant for the true heroes of Hurricane Gustav to its untold millions piling up in HSUS bank accounts.

This appears to be a pattern at HSUS going back decades and predates even their current CEO: [Wayne "I don't have a hands-on fondness for animals" Pacelle](#). In the 1980s, HSUS ran into trouble for using funds earmarked for animal care to provide private perks for its executive team, including renting ocean front property. In the 1990s, they advocated for the mass killing of feral cats in Riverside Park, VA, only to tell the public that they were involved in making sure the cats were being treated "humanely," ignoring the fact that lactating mothers were being trapped and killed, nursing kittens were abandoned, and that animal control was summarily putting the trapped feral cats to death.

So while Pacelle may have inherited that approach, the fundraising team under his reign at HSUS continues it. There is perhaps no better example of this than the misleading tactics used by HSUS to fundraise off of the Michael Vick dog fighting case. Shortly after the case broke, HSUS contacted the U.S. Attorney prosecuting Vick and asked if they could be "involved" and see the dogs (then being held at six animal control shelters in Virginia). The U.S. Attorney agreed but only on condition that they take no photographs and not publicly talk about the dogs (citing fears of compromising the case, sensitivities involved in the prosecution, and issues surrounding rules of evidence). HSUS agreed and then promptly violated that agreement. HSUS staffers took photographs of the dogs with people wearing "HSUS" shirts to make it appear that HSUS was directly involved in the case and their care.

They then sent out [an appeal for money](#) containing a photograph of someone wearing an HSUS shirt with one of the dogs. In the appeal, HSUS asks for money "to help The Humane Society of the United States care for the dogs seized in the Michael Vick case" and promises to take the money and "put [it] to use right away to care for these dogs." A caption underneath the photograph states: "This dog was one of 52 pit bulls seized from Michael Vick's property—dogs now being cared for by The HSUS..."

Wayne Pacelle himself reiterated this in his July 18, 2007 blog in which he stated that HSUS was "working with federal authorities from the start, and assisting with the care of 52 dogs taken from Vick's property."

The only problem with the appeal is that it wasn't really true. HSUS was not caring for the dogs as they claimed, they were not primarily looking for money to care for the dogs, and the money raised was not primarily going to be "put to use right away to care for these dogs."

And while the Federal Mail Fraud Statute (the oldest federal consumer protection statute in the United States) defines fraud as a scheme which uses the U.S. mail to obtain money by means of false or fraudulent representations, HSUS was careful to avoid it. Beneath the photograph with the dog and a person wearing an HSUS shirt is the statement that the dogs were being cared for by HSUS "and other shelters." In fact, it was "the other shelters" doing all the day-to-day caring.

The appeal also asked (twice) for money to help them care for the Vick dogs, but also "to support other... programs." In fact, aside from a few thousand dollars given to the shelters caring for the dogs out of the large sum purportedly raised, the funds raised from this appeal went ostensibly to these "other" programs. The Vick dog photograph, the talk of the Vick dogs, the part about caring for the Vick dogs was all part of the elaborate distraction. In reality, it was the "other" programs part that was operative.

In reading [the appeal](#), replete with a photograph of one of the Vick dogs in the arms of a person wearing an HSUS shirt, and combined with statements made by Pacelle, it is arguable that people who donated to this appeal thought they were primarily supporting the day-to-day care HSUS was supposedly providing for the Vick dogs. To be fair, HSUS should divulge the names of all the individuals who gave money based on this appeal, how much they gave, whether they believed based on the appeal's representations that HSUS was actually providing direct care and/or in physical custody of the seized dogs, and whether they thought the money they gave would go primarily, if not exclusively, to help care for the Vick dogs.

Taking people's money under suspect pretenses is bad enough. Doing so at the expense of the dogs is simply unforgivable. Because HSUS violated the agreement with the U.S. Attorney, relations between the government agencies involved in the Vick prosecution and the humane movement were soured. According to humane participants in the case, HSUS's actions made it more difficult to work with the federal agencies, who now had reason to distrust these organizations. The outcome could have been disastrous for the dogs had the government refused to work with all humane groups as a result.

No one—including Pacelle himself—would have likely lost any sleep over this because, in the end, HSUS itself [lobbied the court to have all the dogs killed](#). According to Wayne Pacelle himself: "we have recommended to the [government], and believe, the [dogs] will be eventually put down."

The uproar among true dog lovers (people who actually do have a "hands-on fondness for animals") was swift and unending. As a result, HSUS back-pedaled. They stated the issue of Pit Bulls was "complicated." They said that complaints were being spearheaded by those hostile to animal protection (i.e., if you can't attack the message, attack the messenger.) They said they provided a few "thousand dollars" to the shelter actually caring for the dogs. And, their violating the agreement with the U.S. attorney notwithstanding, they stated that they wanted to help "but the federal government has decided to shoulder the burden on its own ..." (The ASPCA's subsequent involvement would put the lie to the latter claim.)

Thankfully, the ASPCA did step in. (As harsh a critic as I am about many of the ASPCA's policies, they did the right thing here). They told the government agencies that they would not violate any agreements. They offered to evaluate the temperament of all the dogs. They suggested that the court appoint a special master to oversee the placement of the dogs. And they succeeded. All but one of the dogs passed their evaluation. Two are now therapy dogs, with one of the dogs bringing comfort to cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. Some have been adopted into loving homes. And rescue groups across the country stepped up to the plate to promise lifetime care for the rest of them—no thanks to HSUS, which once again did the least, potentially could have caused irreversible harm, advocated for the dogs to be killed, but took a lion's share of the bounty.

And therein lies the rub. For HSUS, money appears to be the goal, not a means to the goal of saving animals. And on this score, they succeeded. The only problem is: that success potentially betrays the animals and the hard working rescuers who actually go the extra mile for them.