

Saturday, August 18, 2007

[Rejecting the Consensus of Killing](#)

A recent story in [USA Today](#) portrayed No Kill shelters in a negative light. The article quoted the Humane Society of the United States, the ASPCA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, and other groups who legitimize shelter killing as saying that No Kill was akin to warehousing animals and that No Kill groups were derelict because they refused to kill animals. In an astonishing statement, the head of the ASPCA, Ed Sayres, went so far as to say "there is no room for No Kill as morally superior." It is deeply lamentable that agencies founded to care for animals in need would claim that killing is on equal footing to saving lives. But it is not surprising. While taking the lion's share of funding for companion animals, these groups do very little to save the lives of animals in U.S. shelters, while continuing to champion failed models and promoting the Orwellian logic that "killing is kindness."

At open admission shelters in Tompkins County (NY), Charlottesville (VA), at the Nevada Humane Society in Washoe County (NV), shelters with a history of dirty facilities and an over-reliance on killing became transformed virtually overnight when they replaced their long-term directors with animal lovers dedicated to lifesaving. Where there was little more than killing, these communities are now saving over 90% of all the animals, reserving killing to the hopelessly ill or injured, and truly vicious dogs. As one such agency tells it:

"Ever creative and resourceful, we find ways to tap the pet needs of a compassionate community and match all of our animals with the right adopters in due course. And while pets reside in [our shelter], they live in an environment as close to residential living as possible, not in cages. They enjoy a great measure of socializing, exercise, premium ... foods, and the best medical care available. And thanks to our award-winning team of volunteer foster families, shelter capacity can be stretched by sending our animals to temporary homes until it's their turn to find their forever home."

As the incredible and often immediate lifesaving results reaped by shelter directors who have embraced the No Kill philosophy and its programs and services over the last decade have demonstrated, we know how to end the killing of homeless animals. The same programs and services have resulted in success in every community in which they have been implemented comprehensively and with integrity. Unfortunately, few communities have done so, and most lack the political will to implement them. This is because most animal control directors are content not to and groups like HSUS and the ASPCA continue to provide them political cover by intentionally omitting the fact that No Kill has already been achieved in several communities and disingenuously portraying No Kill as an unattainable goal.

It should also be noted that HSUS does not run shelters and has not in nearly half a century. Nor are we aware that their Director of Animal Sheltering has ever run an animal shelter and certainly not one that has achieved No Kill success. It is time that the humane community and city governments cease relying on the advice of agencies and individuals who have never achieved lifesaving success. In fact, it is irresponsible for individuals associated with groups like HSUS to be offering themselves as No Kill experts, in light of the evidence that they are hostile to No Kill, have at best only a superficial understanding of it, have never had success at saving lives in shelters or have never run a shelter, and are ignorant of the dynamic and exciting changes occurring in the field of animal sheltering as a result of the No Kill movement and the models which have proven successful in those communities which have implemented them.

So why do groups like HSUS continue to ignore this and continually mislead the public by framing the issue in a negative light? Historian John Barry writes that "[i]nstitutions reflect the cumulative personalities of those within them, especially their leadership. They tend, unfortunately, to mirror less admirable human traits, developing and protecting self-interest and even ambition. They try to [create] order [not by learning from others or the past, but]... by closing off and isolating themselves from that which does not fit. They become bureaucratic."

One of the fundamental downsides of bureaucracies is their focus on self-preservation at the expense of their mission. And in the case of animal shelters and the national allies who support them, this bureaucracy leads to the unnecessary killing of animals. As a result, regressive shelters and their national allies have long painted No Kill in an unfair and untrue light. Roger Caras, the late-President of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals called No Kill a "hoax." The National Animal Control Association published articles indicating that No Kill was a "delusion" and perhaps even "cruel." And the Humane Society of the United States has likened them to a "glorified collector" at worst, and as leading to animal abandonment at best. This type of cynicism has in design only one purpose: to defend those who are doing a poor job at saving lives from public criticism and public accountability by painting a picture of the alternative as even darker. The picture these naysayers have painted of No Kill is an untrue one in which dogs and cats live out their lives in filthy, cramped quarters prone to disease and mental deterioration. In short, they falsely claim that No Kill is akin to animal hoarding.

Animal hoarding, however, has nothing to do with the No Kill movement. The No Kill movement seeks to end unnecessary shelter killing. Animal hoarding, by contrast, is not about the animals. It is a mental illness and a crime perpetrated by individuals. And it should be treated and punished as such. That some hoarders might call themselves "No Kill shelters" is irrelevant. If No Kill did not exist, they would just call themselves "caring pet owners." Would we condemn sharing our homes with companion animals because of that? Of course not. Indeed, newspapers and news stations periodically report stories of child abuse perpetrated by foster families. Does that mean we should condemn foster care for children? Should we call for the elimination of orphanages and demand that killing of homeless children be the norm? Why then do we allow groups to paint a distorted picture of No Kill shelters?

If anything, true hoarders thrive in high kill shelter communities because they can rationalize to their friends and family the accumulation of too many animals. They have no choice but to keep these animals, they say, because their local shelter will only kill them. With shelters committed to No Kill solutions, there would be no excuses.

In fact, No Kill is the opposite of hoarding, it is the opposite of filth, and it is the opposite of lack of veterinary care. In 1998, No Kill advocates in California pushed a major animal shelter reform package through the State Legislature. One aspect of the reform was the requirement that shelters had to provide care to impounded animals (socialization, nutrition and veterinary care.) It also required shelters to assess cats to differentiate between feral cats and shy or frightened cats. It required shelters to offer animals for adoption. It required them to provide lost and found information to the public. And more. The law was uniformly supported by No Kill shelters and rescue groups around the state. It was, however, opposed by many of the large national organizations and by virtually every major animal control shelter in the state with a few notable and progressive exceptions. This is what happens when you value animals so little that killing them for expediency becomes preferable to putting in place a foster care program, a medical and behavior rehabilitation program, to opening the shelter up to the scrutiny of the public and to their support through a volunteer program, by sterilizing rather than killing feral cats, and by taking animals the to offsite adoption locations to better help find them homes.

The philosophical underpinning of the No Kill movement is to put actions behind the words of every shelter's mission statement: "All life is precious." No Kill is about valuing animals. And valuing animals not only means saving their lives, it means good quality care. Saving lives requires a shelter to keep animals healthy and happy, make the shelter more inviting for the public, and allow animals to move through the system as quickly as possible. No Kill does not mean announcing a policy change and then getting bogged down with animals because there are no programs to keep animals moving through the system and into loving homes.

No Kill means comprehensive implementation of the [No Kill Equation](#) which includes adoption, foster care, transfer to rescue groups, pet retention programs, spay/neuter, and helping people overcome medical, behavior and environmental conditions which may cause people to relinquish their animals. Doing so eliminates the problem of "overcrowding," unreasonably feared by sincere animal lovers and unfairly painted by cynical proponents of the status quo.

We need to send a message to people like Ed Sayres of the ASPCA, Kim Intino of HSUS and all the other dinosaurs quoted in the misleading article: No Kill is morally superior to killing. To claim otherwise, is to abandon the very principles of compassion, caring and kindness that are the underpinnings of this movement's founding. But take heart, the days when killing was promoted as kindness are coming to an end. And the dinosaurs of this movement will soon be swept aside.

Take a tour of U.S. shelters by [clicking here](#) and see for yourself. Is this really what we should be championing?

Sunday, November 18, 2007

[Same As It Ever Was](#)

Between Seattle and Portland, a large billboard off of Interstate 5 reads "In 2008, can I just vote No?" The sentiment is real. It touches a chord in all of us who have watched politicians over the last decade who say one thing, while they believe and act another way, and leave us trusting no one.

What I believe the author of that billboard wants is the same thing we all want. Americans want someone who will speak the truth, who will tell us how they really feel, what they truly believe, and what, if elected, their Administration will stand for, practice, promote and most of all, fight for. In other words, we are dying for authenticity.

Unfortunately, not a single candidate, regardless of the political party, has chosen to speak with integrity for Americans. They speak the language of the common man, but it is bereft of authenticity. Instead, we are given platitudes, clichés, empty phrases, emptier suits, and what the great 19th Century French novelist Alexandre Dumas called "mouths that say one thing, while the heart thinks another." That is what we have been given for nine years, and that is what the candidates are giving us still.

These last nine years have not been lost on Wayne Pacelle, the head of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the nation's largest "animal welfare" organization. Speaking with a politician's desire to avoid the truth, avoid controversy, avoid alienating the animal control bureaucracy to which he is intimately connected, avoid losing revenue from people who are tired of the killing of dogs and cats, avoid HSUS' own sordid history of opposing progressive programs which have been proven to save animals, avoid the fact that HSUS continues today to legitimize the killing of animals in shelters, Wayne Pacelle posted a blog on November 8 declaring his support for No Kill, claiming HSUS always supported No Kill, and taking credit for the lifesaving gains over the last several decades, which in reality were the result of programs HSUS opposed and fought to prevent.

The blog is written with a politician's pen and a politician's goal. In other words, it is filled with platitudes, clichés, empty phrases, desire for money, desire for power, and a mouth that says one thing, while the heart—and HSUS—thinks and does another. It is disingenuous. And it lacks the integrity and authenticity to atone for past mistakes, to change policies in the present, and to move the nation forward with a bold new vision for the future. It is out of touch with how most of us feel about dogs and cats. It continues to hide behind half-truths and outright lies. And it avoids the reality of what HSUS continues to do in practice to thwart lifesaving No Kill initiatives around the country.

Why Does it Matter What HSUS Says and Does?

HSUS has the potential to lead us toward our inevitable No Kill future. We will get there, even if we have to do what we have always done: fight HSUS every step of the way. But by cooperating with us, rather than working against us, we can get there much more quickly. As a result, HSUS could lessen the body count by millions of animals if they supported, rather than thwarted the effort as they have historically done and continue to do. The potential for nearly overnight success under an HSUS which fully and completely embraces the No Kill philosophy is very real. But under Mr. Pacelle's leadership, it is being thwarted; the body count increases. I do not make this claim lightly.

HSUS is the nation's largest and wealthiest humane advocacy organization in the nation. It has assets in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and it has a budget in excess of one hundred million dollars annually. It claims the support of twelve million members and it has a powerful media presence. Their magazine, *Animal Sheltering*, is sent to shelters nationwide. Their animal sheltering conference, HSUS Expo, is the nation's largest, drawing sheltering staff from across the country.

More than that, shelters nationwide defer to them, and look to HSUS for guidance and direction. It is not uncommon for shelters to proclaim that they are run in line with HSUS policies. And when activists in communities working for reform pressure local government to embrace No Kill, HSUS responds by defending the shelter director and their failures and refusal to change, calling No Kill "impossible," "unreasonable," and attempting to sow seeds of doubt among public officials, such as recently occurred in King County, Washington.

Where No Kill is succeeding, such as in Reno, Nevada, HSUS supports the efforts of Dr. Kate Hurley, an anti-No Kill veterinarian, who goes to those communities to intentionally derail their success by arguing that No Kill is a bad idea and equating it with animal hoarding.

It has been over a decade since San Francisco pioneered the lifesaving model of the No Kill Equation to become the first to end the killing of healthy homeless dogs and cats, an achievement HSUS denigrated. It has been five years since No Kill success has been achieved in communities such as Tompkins County, New York from 2002-2007, in Charlottesville, Virginia, since 2006, and increasingly elsewhere, which HSUS ignored. And HSUS has never reported this success to their constituents, shelter directors, or local governments, and has not embraced the only model which has made it possible.

In addition, shelter bureaucrats who aren't told they must change the way they do business (the business of killing) by HSUS, do not feel pressured to do so. They feel vindicated. Shelter bureaucrats who fail to invest in the programs and services of the No Kill Equation are held out as pillars by HSUS despite their regressive practices. Shelter bureaucrats who boldly proclaim that the five million animals being executed every year are not being "killed" at an HSUS conference, but instead are being given the "gift of euthanasia" as a supporter of the HSUS position on sheltering stated, without being forced to recant, are emboldened to continue. Self-proclaimed experts are hailed by HSUS and lead workshops endorsed by HSUS when they claim that Pit Bulls should not be adopted to families with children and falsely claim that the vast majority are aggressive and should be killed. Communities which are told that No Kill is akin to "warehousing" and are falsely told that saving the lives of the vast majority of shelter animals is "unreasonable" by HSUS fail to demand results in their shelters. Governments which are told by HSUS that "No Kill is a sham," "feral cat caretakers are closet hoarders," or that the only way to achieve No Kill is to "adopt Pit Bulls to dogfighters," stop before they start paving the road to building truly humane societies. And health departments which are told that killing 22,000 of the 25,000 dogs and cats a year are within the "norms" of U.S. shelters can boldly proclaim that they are doing a "good job."

This is what has occurred or continues to occur without so much as a whimper of protest from Wayne Pacelle, often with the blessing of HSUS or, just as often, done by HSUS itself. These are not examples of a bygone era. The vast majority have occurred under Mr. Pacelle's leadership of HSUS. They occur still. There is no new HSUS position. And, as a result, the business of killing will continue in most of our nation's shelters.

Because rather than direct HSUS' enormous influence toward comprehensive national reform and true No Kill advocacy, Mr. Pacelle and his staff continue to provide the political cover for the status quo and to those directors determined to maintain it. Just a few months ago, HSUS sought to prevent the King County, WA, Council from embracing a mandate to achieve an 85% save rate of dogs and cats in its shelters, citing opposition to No Kill, calling the request "unreasonable," and siding with a regressive administration which oversaw a shelter where "the animals suffer from high rates of disease, improper housing, inadequate exercise and social contact, a lack of basic comforts, and high levels of stress." (King County Animal Care & Control Citizens Advisory Committee, September 24, 2007.)

Wayne Pacelle says in his blog that HSUS is and has always been committed to No Kill and the lifesaving programs it entails, but this is patently false. It was HSUS' Jim Tedford who called TNR "inhumane" and "abhorrent." It was HSUS' Phyllis Wright who said that killing animals was kindness and that she never worried about the 70,000 dogs and cats she herself put to death. It was HSUS' Roger Kindler who argued that caring for feral cats was illegal under North Carolina's statutes against abandonment, which carried a jail term. It was HSUS which:

- Opposed plans to establish a TNR program on the Georgetown University campus;
- Endorsed the round up and killing of feral cats at Riverside Park in Virginia;
- Unfairly inflated the death rate for dogs and cats killed in San Francisco shelters to downplay the success of No Kill efforts;
- Opposed maintaining the integrity of the 1998 Animal Shelter Law in California which required shelters to work with rescue groups and added protections for feral cats and other sheltered animals;
- Opposed shelters working with rescue groups to place animals who would otherwise be killed;
- Rallied around the New York City animal control shelter even after the comptroller's audit found "a number of allegations of animal neglect and abuse." The report found that not only were animals wrongly killed, but "many animals didn't have regular access to water and were often left in dirty cages";
- Supported an animal control shelter at a time when a No Kill agency was poised to take over sheltering operations in Rockland County, New York, even after an auditor substantiated allegations of high rates of shelter killing and other deficiencies that were not corrected after a year;
- Opposed a rescue group's efforts to get pre-killing notification from animal control in Page County, Virginia, so that they could save the dogs, calling the request unreasonable;
- Said No Kill was impossible in Philadelphia unless Pit Bulls were given to dogfighters and labeled feral cat caretakers as "closet hoarders";
- Claimed at a hearing in Eugene, OR that No Kill was a sham and that killing was necessary.

Unequivocally, HSUS has been obstinate in the past when it came to ending the needless killing of savable animals in shelters. The changes in some of these policies did not come easily. They were made only when their positions threatened either their fundraising or leadership position, or when they became politically and publicly untenable. Granted, they are no longer arguing that sending animals to rescue groups rather than killing them is a bad idea because transfer to rescue group would "stress" the animals the way they have done in the past. But they have not truly embraced the No Kill philosophy. For example,

- HSUS recently opposed an ordinance in King County, WA which would have required county shelters to work diligently to save 85% of all incoming animals calling the request "unreasonable;"
- HSUS participated in a No Kill hit piece on the front page of USA Today claiming that No Kill was essentially warehousing animals;
- HSUS pressured the National Animal Law Center at Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland to withdraw sponsorship of a No Kill seminar there;
- HSUS supports the efforts of Kate Hurley (more on her in a later blog), a veterinarian, who is going to communities such as King County, WA, and Reno, NV, to oppose No Kill efforts occurring there;
- HSUS fundraised claiming it needed money to help the dog victims rescued from dog fighter Michael Vick, but added very fine print saying the money might not be used for the Vick dogs. HSUS then publicly stated that the Vick dogs should be killed. (All but one of the dogs passed a test for aggression and were being saved as of this blog);
- HSUS supported Austin, TX animal control's desire to move the shelter from the vibrant community of downtown Austin which is the daily destination for thousands of Austinites to a more remote, industrial location where it would have led to decreased adoptions, but would have meant bigger offices for shelter bureaucrats;

- HSUS raised tens of millions of dollars ostensibly to help animals impacted by the Hurricane Katrina disaster, but spent only a fraction of it. Tens of millions are still in HSUS bank accounts—money that could and should have been used for the donors' intent: to save lives in the Gulf States. (HSUS announced 'Mission Accomplished' and left, even while animals were still suffering in the aftermath of the destruction).

One of the most unfortunate aspects of continued opposition or failure to fully embrace the No Kill philosophy by national organizations like the Humane Society of the United States is the lost opportunity to profoundly influence animal shelters in a life-affirming way. We can imagine, for a moment, what the future would look like if HSUS embraced the notion that animals in shelters have a right to live, No Kill philosophies should be implemented everywhere, and used its vast wealth to provide shelters with the training and tools they need to succeed in those endeavors. No other agency has the ability, resources, and influence to bring about a No Kill nation faster.

Every day that HSUS denigrates or fails to fully and unequivocally embrace No Kill, delays that potential future. Instead, animal lovers have to fight pet limit laws, mandatory registration laws, and other destructive policies promoted by these organizations. Instead of turning to these organizations for support and guidance, No Kill groups have to spend time trying to overcome the obstacles they lay in the path to lifesaving. As a result, *and because of the cost in animal lives that this potentially entails*, HSUS continues to fail miserably in terms of moving this country away from traditional, reactionary, "adopt some and kill the rest" sheltering practices, despite Mr. Pacelle's facile claims to the contrary.

Failure to Lead

In feeling the groundswell of grassroots pressure for change that is occurring, Mr. Pacelle could have chosen to lead us going forward. He could have chosen to champion the animals, rather than the entrenched animal control bureaucracy he currently represents. He could have taken a real, honest, principled stand that put No Kill on the agenda of every community, every shelter nationwide. He could have insisted on it, and then told his employees at HSUS to follow through to make it happen. I would have been the first to stand up and cheer. I would have gladly stood *behind* Wayne Pacelle.

Instead, he gives us platitudes and thinly veiled attacks on those who can envision a new and better and life-affirming future. And he gives the five million animals scheduled to be slaughtered in shelters next year insult above the injury they already face. It is a slap in the face to animal activists all over the country who know full well that the animal control shelter and just as often, the large private shelter is not doing a good job, is regressive in its policies, and continues to kill in the face of alternatives. It is business as usual. And nothing in Mr. Pacelle's blog fundamentally and unequivocally changes that.

The conclusion becomes inescapable. As a movement and as a nation, our values relating to companion animals are far more progressive and humane than the nation's largest animal protection organization. It is up to us to lead the country into a more humane future by rejecting the 19th Century model of animal sheltering (adopt some and kill the rest) HSUS so tenaciously and tragically clings to. It is irresponsible for HSUS and staff to be offering themselves as "experts" or "leaders" to the media, to the public, to city governments and to the movement, especially in light of the evidence that No Kill is a concept to which staff at HSUS has been historically opposed and that HSUS staff have, at best, only a superficial understanding (and an erroneous one at that) of the dynamic and exciting changes occurring in the field of animal sheltering as a result of the No Kill movement. In the end, it is far better to disband the Department of Companion Animal at HSUS, than maintain it in its current reactionary form. Because without true reform, the time has come when Americans in general, the humane community and city governments more specifically, must cease relying on the advice of Mr. Pacelle and his staff.

We have learned what we can expect under Mr. Pacelle's tenure: platitudes, clichés, rhetoric, pretty words. But we cannot expect solutions. We cannot expect a vision for the future, the roadmap for saving lives. So we must provide it for him.

Where Do We Go From Here?

We are a nation of dog and cat lovers, and we demand that the killing to be brought to an end. We are 150 million Americans strong. Right now, there are only a few thousand shelter directors killing 4.5 million savable dogs and cats each year, who are standing in the way of a No Kill nation and have historically been doing so with the blessing and assistance of the nation's most powerful and influential so-called "humane" organization—HSUS.

Mr. Pacelle's blog makes clear that he has no idea how to lead the humane movement. It is clear he cannot see the future for himself. At the same time, we need to send a very strong message to Mr. Pacelle that we can see through his thinly veiled comments, his insincerity on the issue, his failure to truly challenge the status quo, to fight for the rights of shelter animals to their very lives, and to truly reform what has been a long sordid history of draconian HSUS policies as it relates to dogs and cats in shelters.

And so Mr. Pacelle, I say to you:

We reject your obfuscation, we reject your dishonesty, and we reject the killing your agency continues to legitimize. As Americans who want to end the killing today—not at some mythical indeterminate future time, which appears to have no end—we demand that HSUS change in earnest, and that you demonstrate that change by signing—and promoting—the *U.S. No Kill Declaration*.

The *Declaration* calls upon shelters to implement all the programs and services of the No Kill Equation, and for shelters to open their doors to the light of public scrutiny. It calls for shelters to bring about an end to the killing without delay. The *Declaration* proves the irreconcilability between the No Kill philosophy on the one hand and, on the other, the archaic voices of tradition. Unlike HSUS' *Asilomar Accords*, which allow shelters to ignore the programs and services of the No Kill Equation (leaving these pivotal programs to "local decision-making"), the *Declaration* calls for comprehensive and rigorous implementation of all of them. Sadly, not one of the signatories of the *Asilomar Accords* has endorsed the *Declaration*; and, to this day, you continue to refuse to sign it.

I am sending you a gift, Mr. Pacelle. In the mail, you will receive from me a pen. I ask you to use it to sign the *U.S. No Kill Declaration*. For—as 10,000 signatories have already attested to—it is the No Kill philosophy and its implementation alone which holds the key to a more noble future—a future where animals will find in shelters a new beginning, instead of what HSUS holds out for them today, which is the end of the line.

Sign the *U.S. No Kill Declaration* and call off your employees, such as those in Seattle and Eugene, who are working to hinder and undermine No Kill efforts throughout the United States. For the first time ever, you now claim to support No Kill. I ask you to prove it. The remaining chapters of the No Kill movement's history have yet to be written, Mr. Pacelle. How will you be remembered?

To read the 20-page point-by-point analysis of Mr. Pacelle's blog, [click here](#) (skip the introduction and go to page 8)

Hear it for Yourself

HSUS' own expert denies that shelters are even killing animals. At HSUS' national animal sheltering conference in 2006, HSUS held a workshop on killing in which the "expert" stated:

We are not killing them, we are taking their lives, we are ending their lives, we are giving them a good death, we are humanely destroy-, whatever, but we are not killing. And that is why I can't stand the term No Kill shelters.

Listen for yourself by [clicking here](#).

What is more disturbing than the fact that animal control staff from across the nation responded with a thunderous applause (undermining their claim that they are committed to saving lives), what is more troubling than the fact that HSUS is advancing the Orwellian notion that killing is not killing, that killing is, in fact, an act of kindness, is that when you deny that what you are doing is exactly what you are doing, when you disparage a movement founded to save the lives of animals, when you refuse to take responsibility for the killing, the impetus to change your own behavior that might negate the perceived "need" to kill disappears. The end result is the status quo: more animals going out the back door in a body bag than out the front door in the loving arms of families.

See it for Yourself

Waynce Paccelle says that all animal control agencies, all groups, and everyone involved in sheltering is committed to saving lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. Take a visual tour of U.S. shelters by [clicking here](#).

Friday, January 25, 2008

[Fear Mongering at HSUS: "I Chose a Child's Face Over My Dog"](#)

Over 150 years ago, Henry Bergh started North America's first humane society, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). While early humane efforts primarily focused on protecting animals who had been forced into labor (horses to pull railways, dogs to churn butter, pigs to eat garbage on behalf of the sanitation department), it did not take long for Bergh and his SPCA to set their sights on the abuses of local dog catchers. The other SPCAs, humane societies and animal welfare groups that began to dot the American landscape, though distinct and independent, nevertheless modeled themselves after Bergh's ASPCA. While local pounds were busy killing animals (treating them poorly in the process), humane groups were fighting to lower death rates and better their plight. In many ways, the battle rages to this day. While animal control is claiming to protect *people* from the (often incorrectly) perceived threats caused by *animals*, animal welfare groups are trying to protect *animals* from *people*. These have always been two very distinct movements, opposing each other on fundamental issues of life and death.

While we can try to bring these opposing principles closer together, the tension can never be eliminated. In the No Kill philosophy, we try to reconcile them as much as possible, forcing accountability onto animal control so that the only animals killed are those who are irremediably suffering (rigorously defined as a hopelessly ill or injured animal with a poor or grave prognosis for being able to live without severe, unremitting pain), hopelessly ill or injured (a sick or injured animal with a poor or grave prognosis for rehabilitation), or in the case of dogs, truly vicious (with a poor or grave prognosis for rehabilitation). But for 93% or so of the animals who do not fit these definitions, the No Kill philosophy not only demands that shelters save them, but through the No Kill Equation—comprehensively and rigorously implemented so that they replace killing entirely—provides the key to do so.

It is only through the No Kill philosophy that we begin to truly reduce the disparity between "animal control" and "animal welfare" in a way that is fair to the animals, and, for example, protects the public from the truly vicious dog. That doesn't mean that there aren't some irreconcilable tensions. There are, as discussed below. But it does mean we have put our cards on the table so that we can make distinctions and decisions in a fair and open manner.

When we simply ignore the distinctions (pretending to ourselves and to the American public that no such disparity exists) or when we call ourselves one thing, but profess the opposite, we come dangerously close to the dictionary definition of lying. At the very least, we are misrepresenting ourselves, hiding behind the veneer of "animal welfare" or "animal protection," when we really promote a philosophy that puts animals last or worse—even allows them to be executed based on unfair, misleading, impermissible, and thoughtless claims.

Among other things, this is the very heart of what is wrong with the Companion Animal division at the

Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). And it is why I have long argued that it should be disbanded. Better to disband a dysfunctional department which promotes a vision at odds with its public animal welfare claims, than to allow it to undermine the work of No Kill proponents across the country.

The Humane Society of the United States claims to be about saving animals, about promoting the bonds between people and animals, and about leading the cause of animal welfare. But how can this be reconciled with their support for the killing of healthy dogs and cats in shelters to this very day? Or with their historical claim that mass killing of feral cats is the only “practical and humane” solution? It simply cannot.

As to the question of why they insist on taking positions that are, at their core, inherently antithetical to animal welfare, we must look to the “actors” who make up the leadership of the organization, particularly the Companion Animal division. Here, the term “actor” is deliberate. Because while they play the public persona of animal lovers who would leave no stone unturned if it held out the promise of saving lives, the reality is that historically and presently, the leadership comes primarily from the ranks of animal control, from a mindset that animals can and should be killed, that people must be protected from them (without regard for true risk analysis) and even that killing them is an act of kindness. HSUS functionaries often come from animal control organizations that kill animals, and they carry that mindset with them to a new organization that is supposed to have a different mission. And so they denigrate the animals they are supposed to protect, and use HSUS as a mouthpiece to veil their reactionary animal control agendas under the cloak of “animal welfare.”

And the public has, until recently, accepted it, because this view has dominated the national discussion of companion animals for so long; and, has essentially been the only voice, until the No Kill movement called it into question. In fact, the lack of challenge to this position has convinced many animal activists—even those who would label themselves as “animal rights”—to accept extreme Orwellian notions that killing is kindness, that cats are better off dead than outdoors, that dogs and cats should be killed, because it comes cloaked in the mantle of large, national animal welfare (and animal rights) groups. As a result, they have essentially been brainwashed to think that animal control based on killing poses no contradiction with an animal welfare mission, even though the latter has an altogether different philosophical underpinning. And as long as groups like HSUS simply ignore the distinction and bring animal control mindsets to animal welfare without a bridging philosophy that is ethical and rigorous, animal control based on killing will continue to ride roughshod over animal welfare—and compassion will fall victim to control. (At its most enlightened, the two will come closest together under the banner of the No Kill philosophy.)

Demonizing Cats

For anyone who loves cats, HSUS’ history of villainizing, vilifying, and calling for their mass killing has been a sad and tragic reality. It was HSUS which called the mass slaughter of feral cats in shelters the only “practical and humane solution.” It was HSUS which asked a criminal prosecutor to find that TNR programs are a violation of state anti-cruelty laws and can subject caretakers to jail and prosecution. It was HSUS that spread fear-based hysteria about cats and bird flu, even as the World Health Organization found no risk. It is HSUS which falsely accuses cats of:

- Being a public rabies threat: “cats are now the most common domestic vectors of rabies”;
- Decimating wildlife: “free-roaming cats kill millions of wild animals each year”;
- Being invasive, non-native intruders: “cats are not a part of natural ecosystems, and their predation causes unnecessary suffering and death;” and,
- Causing neighborhood strife: “they also cause conflicts among neighbors.”

It is HSUS which instructed shelters to denigrate cats by having them “document public health problems that relate to cats. Include diseases that are spread from cat to cat as well as those spread between cats

and other animals," without regard for real risk analysis. And it is HSUS which continues to legitimize shelter killing of healthy and treatable cats by promoting their killing in shelters as a "necessity."

As cat lovers, we have long rejected the fear-based, mistruth-based, and outright inflammatory anti-cat statements coming out of HSUS. Nor were we surprised when they left the Katrina-ravaged Gulf State area with millions of dollars in donations left in the bank unspent, which were supposed to be for animals impacted by the hurricane, even while cats continued to suffer in the area.

Demonizing Dogs and Dog Lovers

Nor has HSUS been a true model of ethical advocacy on behalf of dogs either. Like it does for cats, HSUS continues to view the killing of dogs in shelters as both necessary and proper, even if the animals are healthy or treatable. Like cats, the millions raised in the Katrina aftermath which were not spent, would have helped more dogs too. And, unfortunately, when HSUS functionaries attack No Kill and defend shelter killing, as they have in Seattle, Eugene, and Philadelphia, the dogs come away the losers, also.

But fear mongering at HSUS has taken a new turn with the publication of an interview with best-selling author Jon Katz, author of *"A Good Dog,"* in the current issue of *Animal Sheltering* entitled: *"I Chose a Child's Face Over My Dog."* The question and answer format with Katz does nothing to illuminate the truth about aggression or dangerous dogs, and in fact, only serves to heighten stereotypes and perpetuate myths. That Katz killed his dog because of what he considered severe aggression is not what one takes from the article. That would have been a very different piece, a tragedy for all involved—Jon Katz, his dog, and the people his dog hurt. And maybe, just maybe, our hearts would have hurt for all of them.

Instead, HSUS asks a series of very deliberate questions which not only globalize the tragedy that occurred in the Katz family, but appear to assume the worst in dogs, and the worst in people who want to see less of them killed. Opposition is dismissed as irresponsible. Dog lovers are pitted against children. It's the type of either-or, you-are-with-us-or-against-us, your-dog-or-your-child hysteria most of us, especially those of us who love both our dogs and our kids, dismissed long ago. In fact, the parallel to attacks the nascent animal welfare movement was subjected to from industries which hurt animals is stark. Our movement's history is littered with these sorts of unfair accusations by those who profit from animal exploitation.

And the tenor of the article—which is merely restated as Katz' viewpoint giving HSUS "plausible deniability" about the viewpoints advanced—results in the following conclusions:

- Killing dogs becomes unacceptable only when people inappropriately "humaniz[e] dogs."
- "Millions of people are bitten by dogs every year, many tens of thousands of children."
- If you do not believe in killing dogs, you have made them "quasi-religious objects of veneration."
- "Millions of Americans seek medical attention every year for animal bites or attacks."
- "[F]or every troubled or aggressive animal kept alive for months or years, healthy and adoptable animals go wanting for homes and often lose their lives."
- "Insurance companies are paying out billions of dollars to people bitten by dogs."
- As a result of dog bites, "lawyers [are] injected into the human-animal relationship" and this is exacerbated by people who want to see dog killing end.
- Adopting a Pit Bull appears to be more trouble than it is worth.

Every one of these conclusions is deeply flawed and deeply offensive. And, unfortunately, Jon Katz (I would guess without an appreciation of the fact) has allowed himself to become a pawn in HSUS' end game of total hegemony about our role as stewards of dogs and cats—a vision for the future dog lovers across the nation are rejecting.

The Epidemic That Wasn't There

On its website, HSUS says that, "Every year, an estimated 4.7 million people are bitten by dogs." (Not to be outdone, the ASPCA has the following on its website: "50 percent of all children will be bitten by a dog before their 12th birthday.") But is this true? And are we reduced to a choice between dogs and children?

There is little doubt that some dogs are too dangerous for shelters to safely adopt out. The maiming or death of anyone at the hands of a truly vicious dog is a tragedy. No Kill advocates understand this. But what we have been asking for is rigor in making those determinations, not a system of evaluations based on overkill which is the norm. A system built on protecting dogs and protecting children need not be mutually exclusive. At the end of the day, shelters can save upwards of 93% of dogs and more, without endangering the welfare of children by adopting out aggressive dogs.

In fact, the experiences of shelters who have embraced the culture of lifesaving that No Kill represents prove that the vast majority of dogs who enter shelters are friendly. If we take this as a representative sample of dogs in society, then we do not have either an epidemic or even a significant problem of dangerous dogs in the United States that would justify a further clamp-down. If, on the other hand, we take dogs who enter shelters to be at higher risk of aggression (say, for the sake of argument, we can show that they have less training, spend more time isolated outdoors, have less care than dogs who do not enter shelters), then the situation is actually of less concern since we would expect to see more aggression in shelter dogs than dogs who live with their families their whole lives. And given that 93% of shelter dogs are friendly to kids, cats and dogs—the number is higher if we just isolate aggression to people (about 96-97%)—the fear-based hysteria of dangerous dogs becomes demonstrably false.

What is true, however, is that public health authorities, dog bite lawyers, the Centers for Disease Control, legislators, animal control shelters, police departments, humane societies, and even national animal welfare groups argue that millions of people are bitten every year by dogs. Some of these groups call for a ban on certain breeds, others claim we need to teach or enforce "responsible pet ownership;" others seek more and tougher laws. But just because they say it is so doesn't make it so. We have to ask the questions: Is any of this justified? And are the claims of a "dog bite epidemic" true?

In fact, they are not. And while our hearts go out to the victims of serious dog bite attacks, there is little in the way of evidence that more regulation, more laws, further crackdowns on dogs is justified as a way to prevent these. At the end of the day, the vast majority of dogs are friendly and will never act aggressively, dogs are already heavily regulated, and there is little by way of additional public policy initiatives (e.g., legislation) that is needed in trying to prevent a "dog bite epidemic" that simply does not exist. HSUS should stop focusing on this type of fear-based advocacy, stop perpetuating myths, and start educating the public about the truth regarding the dogs they theoretically exist to protect, who they fundraise off of, and who they claim they are working to save.

This type of fear mongering stands the HSUS mission on its head. It is not the job of an animal protection group to mimic the claims of a dog bite lawyer. Where there is fear and misinformation which would call for a crackdown on dogs and dog lovers, with little justification and through methods that provide little in the way of actual protection, it is HSUS' job to quell that, not fan the flames of distortion, as they do in this article.

Despite an explosion in the number of dogs in the U.S. and their greater integration in society, the number of fatal dog attacks has remained relatively constant for decades. You are "five times more likely to be killed by a bolt of lightning" and "four times more likely to be killed by a forklift, even though a very small number of people come into contact with these machines." [Bradley, Janis, *Dogs Bite* (2005: James & Kenneth Publishers)] In other words, comparatively speaking, it is exceedingly rare.

Despite this, dogs remain heavily regulated: they must be licensed with local authorities, they cannot go in public places without a leash (if at all), they must be vaccinated against rabies, you can't live with more than a small number of them, animal control officers can seize and destroy them if they determine that

they are a nuisance, and the threshold of making a determination that they are dangerous and subject to extermination puts dogs at a disadvantage, even when the facts show otherwise. Together, license laws, leash laws, vaccination laws, pet limit laws, nuisance laws, health codes, property laws, and dangerous dog laws control dogs, in concert with an animal sheltering system built on overkill, that there is little justification to tighten the noose even further.

We will never eliminate risk in society. We can minimize it, but in the case of dogs, there is little more that can and should be done. And, in many ways, we need to undo some of the laws and regulations because they allow friendly dogs to be killed without making anyone safer (such as breed bans).

Banning Pit Bulls or any breed of dog is geared to overkill by definition because—media hysteria to the contrary—the vast majority of dog bites occur within the home by many breeds, with the dog biting a member of the family after some provocation, a different causal mechanism than the false image presented: an epidemic of free roaming Pit Bulls attacking unknown children or the elderly. As a result, a breed ban won't stop the vast majority of dog bites. On top of that, roughly 20% of those bites are a result of the dog defending him or her-self from being attacked.

And although HSUS-through-Jon Katz says that “Millions of Americans seek medical attention every year for animal bites or attacks,” what they don't say is that over 92% of dog bites result in no injuries. Let me repeat, over nine out of ten bites that do occur result in no one getting hurt. And of those which do result in injury, 7.5% are minor. In fact, they are less severe than *any other* class of injury. That leaves less than 1% (0.08% to be exact) of all bites ranking at *moderate* or above.

Even if HSUS is correct that 4.7 million people are bitten by dogs each year (they are not), only 0.0002% result in death. And over 4.66 million people don't actually have anything to really show for it. On top of that, of the 92% which do not result in any injury, the vast majority of those don't constitute force, in that they do not result in pain or restraint. (I am not downplaying even the death or maiming of a single person. It is tragic. And as an animal control director, I had no tolerance for the adoption of aggressive dogs. But creating public policy—and shelter standards—needs careful and thoughtful deliberation, not incendiary fanaticism that reduces everything to a meaningless debate about the value of dogs vs. children).

So where did this notion come from that the U.S. has a dog bite epidemic? The numbers are simply flawed extrapolations from two government studies which took a poorly formulated and overly restrictive sample of the population (one reported six dog bites, the other 38) and then simply multiplied those numbers by how many people live in the U.S. That's correct. It is an extrapolation of six dog bites! This is the same unscientific method used by HSUS in the past to demonize feral cats by claiming they are killing hundreds of millions of songbirds, when the facts show otherwise.

When we argue in extremes (the child or the dog), when we set up the problem as a battle of absolutes (no dog should be killed vs. all dogs can be killed), when we demonize people who think we kill too much (dogs are “quasi-religious objects of veneration”), when we pretend to be animal welfare yet profess the beliefs of a system based on killing, we do a disservice to our movement, our kids, and our dogs. And while Jon Katz (wrongly) believes that “for every troubled or aggressive animal kept alive for months or years, healthy and adoptable animals go wanting for homes and often lose their lives,” the truth once again is more sobering. “Healthy and adoptable animals” are being killed in shelters because many shelters cling to regressive, archaic policies that allow them to kill dogs; and, because HSUS provides them the political cover which allows them to continue. And as long as we allow that as a society and as a movement, dogs will continue to be unfairly blamed and unnecessarily killed because of it.

An Addendum: Is it Ethical to Kill Dogs?

The fact that shelters cannot and should not adopt out vicious dogs does not mean that their killing isn't ethically problematic. I ordered vicious dogs killed when I ran an animal control shelter. I have never believed that shelters should adopt out vicious dogs, and I don't believe that now. Killing truly vicious dogs

(so long as shelters rigorously and fairly make those determinations) is politically defensible. I defend it still. But is it truly ethical? It is not.

Right now, our great challenge in sheltering is between No Kill advocates who seek to modernize shelters and make them more progressive, and the voices of archaic tradition ("killing is kindness"). After the latter voices are silenced and No Kill's hegemony is established, we will then have to confront other ethical quandaries within our own philosophy. These ethical quandaries (e.g., killing dogs who are aggressive but can lead happy lives in sanctuaries, giving animals hospice care as opposed to what we call "mercy" killings in shelters) will become more paramount and I, for one, look forward to those debates. Because, at the end of the day, we deceive ourselves when we think our ethical cost/benefit analysis will not change as our movement grows and as animals become further integrated into our communities. But instead of leading us to a more ethical future, the nation's largest and wealthiest "animal welfare" group is the nation's leading voice of archaic tradition when it comes to dogs, cats, animal shelters, and the question of life and death.

In the 1990s, HSUS wrote an article in which it asked itself rhetorically if the agency would ever promote TNR as opposed to mass killing in U.S. shelters and whether it would support and defend the work of feral cat caretakers. The response by their Vice President of Companion Animals was emphatic: the "answers to these questions are still, and will always be, the same: no, no, and absolutely not!" We best serve the animals when we avoid this type of self-delusion. Without the continued pushing of the envelope, without vigorous debate, without constant questioning and reevaluation in light of more information, more knowledge, greater awareness and compassion, more thorough integration of animals in our lives, we become stagnant as a movement. And stagnation is the basis for continued killing, long past the point when we should have known better.

By 2005, HSUS informed the feral cat community that it was "updating" its "feral cat position statements" to "ensure" that their "policies reflect emerging consensus within the field of animal care and control." Once again, by this admission, HSUS proved itself an unworthy organization in the effort to increase the status of companion animals in society. The role of a humane organization is not to follow consensus, but to lead. Unfortunately, HSUS informed the nation's cat lovers that the largest and wealthiest animal welfare agency in the world was content to establish a policy based on the consensus of animal control agencies nationwide—the very agencies with a history of mass slaughter of feral cats.

This is why the average American is far more progressive about dogs and cats than HSUS and every other animal welfare and animal rights organization in the United States, with rare exception. Collectively, we spend over 40 billion dollars on our animals, giving to animal related charities is the fastest growing segment of American philanthropy, and No Kill is on the agenda of local governments nationwide because people are demanding it, despite the efforts to derail its success by these groups. But at the end of the day, it is not about how much we spend, how many animals share our homes, or even about what we seek. In the battle over the hearts and minds of our citizenry, gaining support for No Kill among the American public is a non-sequitur, because we already have it. While HSUS defends shelter killing of even healthy and friendly animals; while PETA defends it (indeed, practices it!); while the ASPCA defends it; most dog and cat lovers, armed with the facts, find it abhorrent.

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

[Saving Pit Bulls from HSUS, PETA, Michael Vick](#)

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and PETA wanted to add the ultimate insult (death) to a life of injury (dog-fighting) for the dog victims of Michael Vick.

Despite the recommendations of HSUS and PETA that they be killed, prosecutors allowed the dogs to go to No Kill adoption groups all over the country.

They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. And these pictures say it all. Where are they now? [Click here](#) to view a photo montage. (There is nothing graphic here, the photographs are pure joy.)

Reno News Gazette writer Mark Robison put it best: "PETA and the Humane Society of the United States lobbied to have all of the pit bulls killed. These organizations really need to be shamed for promoting death instead of life for rescued animals; their opposition to no-kill efforts is simply inexcusable."

To read more about Pit Bulls, [click here](#).

Thursday, May 29, 2008

[Will the Real Wayne Pacelle Please Stand Up?](#)

Wayne Pacelle says [he supports "no kill," then he equates it with hoarding](#). Wayne Pacelle says he values animals, and then his hand-picked Vice President of Companion Animals says [HSUS doesn't have a problem with killing strays](#). When groups like the World Health Organization were telling us not to panic or fear cats due to bird flu because they posed no risk, Pacelle's HSUS was telling people not to touch or rescue strays, but to [call animal control—agencies with a history of mass slaughter—to protect themselves from the threat of bird flu](#).

Wayne Pacelle says [No Kill is impossible](#) (even though it has already been achieved), then he says he was misquoted. Wayne Pacelle says that No Kill must be our goal, than he [refuses to sign the U.S. No Kill Declaration](#). Wayne Pacelle says that feral cats should live, than he promotes a vision of sheltering in the Asilomar Accords which voted down a proposal to mandate TNR, claims [feral cats are "unhealthy" and "untreatable"](#) and are properly put in the same category as hopelessly ill or irremediably suffering animals and often share the same fate—death. Wayne Pacelle raises money to help the dog victims of animal abuser Michael Vick, and then HSUS tells the court [the dogs should be killed](#).

Wayne Pacelle has gone around the country trying to repair relationships with those who have lost faith in HSUS and specifically his (lack of) leadership by saying that HSUS is "changing"—he doesn't actually follow through on the changes, nor should we have to wait for the nation's largest and wealthiest animal organization to stop supporting the unnecessary killing of animals—but then he continues to provide political cover and legitimacy to the killing.

At HSUS Expo 2006, Penny Cistaro, the HSUS featured "expert" on killing, boldly stated—without the slightest hint of apology or irony—that shelters are not killing animals:

We're not, we're not killing them... in that "kill" is such a negative connotation. It's... we're not KILLING them. We are taking their life, we are ending their life, we are giving them a good death, we're humanely destr — whatever. But we're NOT KILLING...[To hear the audio, [click here](#).]

Rather than distance himself or even state he disagrees vehemently, Pacelle invites her back for another round at HSUS Expo 2008 last week in Orlando, FL. At that very same Expo, a representative of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals gave a workshop ostensibly about "maintaining responsible policies in the face of public misperception and scrutiny." When I first read the title and description and saw that PETA was leading the discussion, I suspected that this was nothing more than Pacelle-speak for "how to fight No Kill in your community." And the workshop vindicated my concerns. Any possibility of intelligent discussion was overwhelmed by an extended opening rant that equated No Kill with hoarding, a repetition of an uncaring public being the "real source of the population crisis" and a bastardized version

of the ["starfish on the shore"](#) parable concluding with the (im-)moral that killing is the most humane thing we can do for animals.

What is as equally telling as what was said at Expo 2008 is the deafening silence on issues they should be promoting to shelter directors and personnel nationwide, but do not. HSUS still pretends that the key to ending the killing has not been discovered, that No Kill has not been achieved, that No Kill isn't possible. Except in the most facile way, HSUS isn't aggressively promoting the only model which has created No Kill success, thus failing to give these shelter directors what they most need from a national conference on sheltering: the tools and knowledge to replicate No Kill success in their own communities. Nor does HSUS unequivocally assert that achieving No Kill quickly in every community is an urgent moral imperative and that directors who refuse to do so should be replaced.

And absent from their list of Expo speakers are the directors of shelters who have made No Kill a reality, those who are saving over 90% of all impounded animals even at open admission shelters, those who have rejected the excuses, misinformation, and apologia for killing. In other words, those who have succeeded at the most important job a shelter has—saving lives—are not invited to present at HSUS Expo; that is instead reserved for people who say that “killing is not killing” and groups like PETA—who kill over 90% of the animals they take in.

So despite the fact that Wayne Pacelle appears to “flip-flop” more often than all the presidential candidates combined, when he continues to provide a forum for Orwellian doublespeak that killing is not killing; when he allows functionaries at PETA to equate a movement to save the lives of animals with animal abuse; when he allows staff to boldly proclaim that HSUS isn't opposed to killing stray cats without so much as a public rebuke; when his functionaries fight No Kill efforts around the country, protecting shelters with deplorable records of lifesaving and/or poor care of the animals; Wayne Pacelle continues to put his cronies in the animal movement first, and betray the animals he is supposed to be protecting.

According to HSUS as presented in statements, media quotes, and workshops at their conference, dogs and cats can and should be killed in shelters (it is a “necessity” and the “kindest option”); No Kill is hoarding; and cronies come before the animals being needlessly killed.

So we are left to conclude that this is the real Wayne Pacelle, and that this will be his enduring legacy to the millions of animals needlessly being slaughtered in shelters each year. When someone shows you over and over who they really are, what they really believe, and what they stand for, it behooves all of us to believe them.

That is what I believe the Pacelle record shows. That is what the workshops at HSUS Expo appear to promote. That is what is quoted to the media. That is what is claimed in documents like the Asilomar Accords. And that is what is being stated by HSUS representatives at Council meetings like those in King County, WA and Eugene, OR.

But I also believe these views are dead wrong and pernicious to boot. And I believe that is how history will remember Wayne Pacelle.

Saturday, July 19, 2008

[The Real Wayne Pacelle Legacy](#)

In a *Los Angeles Times* article, Wayne Pacelle, the head of the Humane Society of the United States, is portrayed as a charismatic champion of animal rights. While casually noting that he has some detractors, this is nothing more than a flaccid attempt at balance. Rather than dig deeper, rather than really look at whether there is any merit to the concerns, his detractors are dismissed with childish name calling. One, according to Pacelle, is a “pimp for the industry.” I am called “naïve, narrow minded and mean spirited.”

A little digging, however, would have uncovered a treasure trove of archeological proportions. There are a lot of skeletons in Wayne Pacelle's closet, if the reporter had bothered to open the door.

In Louisiana, Wayne Pacelle's HSUS raised over \$20 million to help the animals impacted by Hurricane Katrina and [only spent \\$4 million before packing up, money piling up in bank accounts, and going home.](#)

In Florida, Wayne Pacelle's HSUS had People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals give a presentation at its conference [equating a movement to save the lives of animals in shelters with the mental illness which leads to animal cruelty](#), despite the fact that PETA slaughters over 90% of the animals they take in and dumped some of the bodies in a supermarket trash bin.

In Virginia, Wayne Pacelle's HSUS raised money allegedly for the dog victims of dogfighter Michael Vick (which they did not have custody of) and [then told the court overseeing the case to go ahead and kill the dogs.](#) (The court refused, they are now with rescue groups and in loving new homes.)

In Iowa, Wayne Pacelle's HSUS stated that they [do not have a problem with the town choosing to kill cats.](#)

In Washington, Wayne Pacelle's HSUS [defended a shelter](#) that allows animals to languish and unnecessarily puts them to death.

In Oregon, Wayne Pacelle's HSUS slammed No Kill and supported a shelter which left all but six cat cages intentionally empty so that staff did not have to clean the cages or work hard, killing the remainder.

Far from being universally loved as the article states, Wayne Pacelle is a polarizing figure in the animal movement—a figure, who by many accounts, is squandering HSUS' vast potential. As the entire animal movement is moving in a vast wave of public support for No Kill, Pacelle is stuck being a shill for shelters that kill. That is why rescue groups protest his annual award ceremony in Los Angeles. That is why animal activists in San Bernardino County called HSUS a "dinosaur." It is why those truly working to save animals after Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans called for a criminal investigation into HSUS fundraising and (lack of) spending on the animals who needed it. And it is why he is condemned by animal lovers from coast to coast.

Wayne Pacelle represents the status quo—a status quo that oversees the wholly unnecessary slaughter of five million dogs and cats a year. And while he claims no one should criticize, that we should work together, what he really means is that people who disagree with the killing should not say so publicly.

And because I dare to question shelters whose staff mistreat, neglect, and outright abuse animals and for demanding the removal of shelter directors who would rather kill animals than save them (such as working with rescue groups, starting a foster program, or embracing any of the other programs of the No Kill Equation), I am called "mean spirited."

To Wayne Pacelle, if you are critical, you are "naïve," "narrow minded," and even "mean spirited." We do not need that kind of divisiveness, he says. Except, of course, when he does it. When Pacelle criticizes, when he calls people "pimps" or "mean-spirited," it is well—it is perfectly acceptable. Because in Pacelle's world, the rules only appear to apply in one direction.

You would expect that the head of the nation's largest and wealthiest animal protection group to acknowledge the fact that there are communities which have ended the killing of healthy animals in U.S. shelters. You would expect that he would acknowledge and promote the model which has ended the killing of all but hopelessly ill animals in others. Instead, he denies it and, through HSUS, calls the killing of healthy animals in shelters "kind" and a "necessity," and equates the movement to save those animals which No Kill represents with animal abuse. And the only time he is vocal about it is when he sells the lie that it doesn't exist or isn't possible.

You would expect that the head of the nation's largest and wealthiest animal protection group would condemn shelter atrocities [like those occurring in Los Angeles shelters](#):

- The abuse of a dog which occurred when a staff member at Los Angeles County's animal control shelter kicked a dog who is being forcibly held upside down with a catch-all pole, hard wire noose wrapped around his neck.
- Or when another at this same shelter dragged a dog with a broken back.
- Or even when another dragged two dogs across hot asphalt.
- Or when others allowed a dog to starve and die in a filthy kennel.
- Or allowed rabbits to go without water.
- Or a sick puppy to languish without any care.
- Or allowed 80% of cat cages to intentionally be kept empty while the shelter kills 80% of all the cats it takes in.

But Pacelle does not condemn it.

He says nothing about it.

He does not fight it.

Given that we now have a formula for ending the killing and examples of it working successfully in several communities, it is our most pressing task to educate the animal loving public that they should expect and must demand better from their local shelter. Once this is accomplished, and the public and media are increasingly armed with the facts and knowledge necessary to see through the smokescreens HSUS puts up in defense of the status quo, self-preservation will demand that HSUS—as the largest animal protection organization in the nation—both embrace and champion an end to shelter killing as vociferously as it currently defends the status quo of killing.

When that finally happens, and new leadership at HSUS finally redirects that agency's mission away from its current one—of defending their colleagues who are responsible for the high kill rates, abuse and neglect common in our nation's animal shelters—back to its original purpose of protecting animals, only then will we be able to fully comprehend, by way of comparison, how very badly HSUS under Pacelle's leadership is failing in its duty to our nation's companion animals.

And while Pacelle currently condemns those who point out these realities and are working to reform our nation's shelters as "mean-spirited," it is through his own work to undermine No Kill that he himself is unwittingly writing the most uncomplimentary words which will eventually memorialize his tenure at HSUS.

Far from the champion of the furry and winged as the *Los Angeles Times* portrays, this is the real Wayne Pacelle, and this will be his enduring legacy to the millions of animals needlessly being slaughtered in shelters each year.

That is what I believe the Pacelle record shows. And I believe that is how history will remember Wayne Pacelle. To use his own words, it is tempting to call Wayne Pacelle nothing more than a "pimp for the industry" of shelter killing. But truth be told, one simple observation is more powerful than childish name calling. It is this: As a defender of animal killing, as someone who stands side-by-side with those responsible for slaughtering thousands of dogs and cats annually, Wayne Pacelle has no place running the nation's largest and wealthiest organization that claims to speak on behalf of defenseless animals.

Thursday, July 24, 2008

[The Real Wayne Pacelle Legacy Part II](#)

In an [earlier blog](#), I discussed how Wayne Pacelle, the head of the Humane Society of the United States, is supposed to be a champion for the “winged” and the “furry,” but is, in many ways, an apologist for their killing. The question, of course, is why is that so? Why does he fail to embrace No Kill and to promote it as the head of the nation’s largest and most influential animal protection organization should? Why does he continue to pretend in statements to the media that No Kill communities do not exist and that the formula for ending the killing has not been discovered? Why does he allow HSUS representatives nationwide to misrepresent and deride No Kill and its supporters and to defend shelters with a poor record for lifesaving?

Time and time again, the positions he has taken regarding companion animals have vexed those of us who have dedicated ourselves to saving the lives of animals. But perhaps there is a simple, logical explanation. Perhaps Wayne Pacelle behaves as though he doesn’t care about animals because, by his own actions and admissions, he doesn’t.

When he was with the Fund For Animals, Pacelle was quoted as saying:

I don't have a hands-on fondness for animals. To this day I don't feel bonded to any non-human animal.

Admittedly, that was over a decade ago. But in this month’s *Los Angeles Times* feature, the reporter writes:

For years, Pacelle did not even have a pet. But when [his girlfriend] moved in with him, she brought along her cat, Libby.

"He's interesting with animals. . . He doesn't want to bother them or invade their space. He's like 'Hello, Libby.'" She imitated a formal, masculine voice, then laughed. "I just want to swoop her up and bury my head in her fur. He just lets her be. So, of course, she just crawls on the counters and he lets her crawl up and sit on his chest. If he needs to work, he'll ask me to remove her."

Despite the facile attempt to spin this into a positive, for those of us who have deep and meaningful relationships with animals, this description is disturbing. He doesn’t share his life with animals. He doesn’t feel compelled to rescue one from death row at any of the shelters he defends or promotes at his conferences. In fact, he has no real relationship with even his girlfriend’s cat who now lives in his home. In the end, he can’t even be bothered to pick up the cat—“he’ll ask me to remove her.”

Throughout history, great visionaries who have successfully led our nation in other social movements did so because of a deep personal caring and conviction that gave them a clarity of vision which allowed them to see through the despair of where society was, to a future which could and should be.

Don’t the five million animals facing certain and yet unnecessary deaths in our nation’s regressive shelters and pounds deserve to have a dedicated, passionate animal lover who is motivated by those very qualities overseeing the organization that has the greatest potential to bring that national tragedy to a speedy and final end? Don’t donors to HSUS, who send that organization their hard earned dollars to the tune of over \$100 million a year under the belief that their donations are going to be used to save animals, deserve to have an earnest individual who shares their values towards animals making decisions about how that organization’s influence and capital can best be expended to further that cause?

In other words, shouldn’t a love for animals be a qualification for running HSUS since right now, it doesn’t appear to be? Is it any surprise then that HSUS under Pacelle continues to champion shelter policies which reflect a lack of caring for animals? And doesn’t this help explain why Pacelle is at odds with those of us who really do love them?

Perhaps lacking both caring and conviction, Wayne Pacelle can't see past the fog of shelter killing, past his own propaganda that it is necessary and kind, past the absolute violent nature of the practice. Perhaps this explains why he cannot or will not muster the courage and fortitude to challenge the status quo of our nation's broken shelter system and the failures of those who oversee it. Perhaps this lack of caring and conviction is why he can't imagine the real potential for ending shelter killing today, nor be inspired to make it a reality through HSUS' leadership. Perhaps this is the reason he refuses to lead on this issue, but prefers to follow, as he himself has unapologetically stated when he explained that HSUS would have policies that "reflect emerging consensus within the field of animal care and control"—the very agencies with a history of mass slaughter.

Perhaps he is thus unable to advocate for a nobler and just future for companion animals because he does not know what that future should look like. And he doesn't know because he does not hurt at the thought of all the beings needlessly put to death. He fails to find it abhorrent. And he can't even call it for what it is: a *slaughter*—something he has said is a "lamentable" choice of words when others have used it, because in his view, it is nothing more than "humane euthanasia."

We are a nation of dog and cat lovers. We cherish their company. We crave their companionship. We keep pictures of them in our wallets. We take time off from work when they are sick. We celebrate their birthdays. We cry at the thought—the very thought—that someday they aren't going to be around. And when it is finally time to say good-bye, we grieve.

Wayne Pacelle, by stunning contrast, appears to barely tolerate his girlfriend's cat. So how does he dare to tell the rest of us, what our relationship to animals should be? And by what hubris does he lead an organization dedicated to those for which he has admitted he has "no hands-on fondness"?

Thursday, August 7, 2008

[Desperately Seeking Wayne Pacelle](#)

A Louisiana shelter, Tangipahoa Parish Animal Shelter, unnecessarily [slaughtered almost every animal in its facility](#) according to media reports. More than 170 dogs and cats lay dead, the victims of a mass killing after animals started getting sick because of the shelter's own mismanagement. A former shelter employee says she'll never forget the image: "I did walk back there at one point and they were all piled on top of each other, just lying there dead."

While there will always be individual cases of disease in a shelter, epidemics or spread of such diseases is almost always a result of sloppy handling and poor cleaning practices. Not surprisingly, former staff "blame management." According to the news report:

"The[animals] didn't get the proper feedings, they didn't get the proper cleaning, they didn't get the proper exercise," says Linda Winkler, a former Tangipahoa Parish Animal Shelter employee. "I mean every issue about taking care of animals got jeopardized."

And after creating a health risk through its own mismanagement, the pound added the ultimate injury (death) to insult (poor care that exposed the animals to disease) by killing almost each and every one. According to former staff, this occurred even though a veterinarian certified some as free of serious illness.

According to news reports:

Despite what some are now calling mismanagement, rescue workers still believe not all of the animals had to die...

Local animal rescue workers are calling the mass [killing] completely unnecessary. "I mean, I can see

[killing] some that are sick and suffering," said Barbara Jaeger with Tangipahoa Adopt-A-Rescue. "...But to just [kill] everything in there, and we could have found rescue groups to help place them..."
The shelter's excuse: "It's kind of like Monday morning quarter-backing woulda, shoulda, coulda..."
Apparently, questioning the mass slaughter of animals and management failures to adequately care for them so they wouldn't get sick in the first place, is nothing more than Monday morning quarter-backing: "woulda, shoulda, coulda." In other words, who cares?

I care. Former staff and volunteers care. Rescue groups care. Pet lovers everywhere care. The question is, does Wayne Pacelle of HSUS care? Tangipahoa Parish Animal Shelter is an HSUS [partner shelter](#).

Many involved in the Hurricane Katrina animal rescue effort may recall that HSUS not only faced criticism from the Louisiana rescue community, it was the subject of an investigation by the Louisiana and Mississippi Attorneys General over Hurricane Katrina related fundraising. HSUS raised tens of millions of dollars ostensibly to help animals impacted by the Hurricane Katrina disaster, but spent only a fraction of it. HSUS subsequently announced their own version of 'Mission Accomplished' and left, even while animals were still suffering in the aftermath of the destruction and with millions still in HSUS bank accounts— money that could and should have been used for the donors' intent: to save lives in the Gulf States then and there.

Nonetheless, in response to continued criticism, HSUS went back to the Gulf States years later as part of a less-than-one-million dollar improvement campaign. The Louisiana pound that put these 170 animals to death is one of those HSUS affiliated shelters [participating](#) in its post-Katrina improvement plan, a shelter where Wayne Pacelle promised animal lovers ["a new dawn for animal care."](#)

That dawn clearly didn't rise for the 170 dead pets. Will he speak out on their behalf?

Saturday, August 9, 2008

[You're doin' a heckuva job Wayne-y](#)

The unnecessary [slaughter of 170 animals](#), including those who were not sick, at Tangipahoa Parish Animal Shelter in the Hurricane Katrina-impacted Louisiana area this past week underscores the need for reform in what is clearly a broken U.S. system of sheltering based on neglect and overkill. It also underscores the need to challenge the large national animal "protection" groups like the Humane Society of the United States which legitimize and provide political cover for the killing and do precious little to change the status quo.

As I indicated [in an earlier blog](#), the Tangipahoa Parish ~~Animal Shelter~~ slaughterhouse is an [HSUS partner](#). It is one of 57 facilities that received money from the Humane Society of the United States in the aftermath of investigations of HSUS "Hurricane Katrina" fundraising where they pocketed millions of dollars which were specifically earmarked for Katrina-victim relief. As part of the less-than-one-million dollar follow-up initiative (they raised tens of millions for Hurricane Katrina which were not spent before they left the devastated area), Wayne Pacelle, the CEO of HSUS, promised ["a new dawn for animal care"](#) at places like the Tangipahoa Parish ~~Animal Shelter~~ slaughterhouse. That dawn clearly didn't rise for the 170 dead animals.

The problem is, Pacelle's pretty words notwithstanding, that "new dawn" had no chance of rising. The grant for facilities like Tangipahoa was little more than a freebie for incompetent and uncaring shelter leaders, with only some of it earmarked for animal care (without the strings which would have given leadership pause before ordering mass killing). Beside minor "facility renovation and program work," the purpose was two fold:

1. To conduct social marketing research in Louisiana and Mississippi areas with high shelter deaths in order to identify why people in these areas didn't spay/neuter their pets (and what to do about it).
2. To collect basic statistics from 57 shelters in the region, many of them among the most affected by Hurricane Katrina.

One of the agencies receiving funding to collect their statistics was the Tangipahoa Parish ~~Animal Shelter~~ slaughterhouse.

When you have to pay the pound to keep basic statistics, you are in trouble as a movement. Without basic data, these agencies are in no position to know if they are doing a good job, meeting goals, doing all they can to save lives. And therein lies the rub, if they haven't been doing it before, they are already lost. If they weren't willing to provide the data willingly, they are telling you they don't care.

But the most frightening aspect is the social marketing research into spay/neuter. Do we really need to fund another study about why poor people don't spay/neuter? Poor people do not spay/neuter because it is not affordable, and it is not easily available to them; and both of these conditions exist because their local pound is (and by definition, pound leadership) abysmal and uncaring and ineffective.

So rather than do pointless research into why people don't spay/neuter, why didn't HSUS just earmark the money directly for free spay/neuter in these regions? And why didn't HSUS add millions more from Hurricane Katrina fundraising to hold [shelter leadership accountable](#), to modernize the shelter system and to provide meaningful programs that save lives?

Perhaps the program allows Pacelle to promise a "new dawn" for animals and raise money for that "new dawn," but doesn't require his organization or the shelters to actually do anything substantive to increase lifesaving. Once again Pacelle gives us platitudes, clichés, rhetoric, pretty words, but no solutions. The HSUS post-Katrina "new dawn" campaign appears to give the appearance of doing something about the killing—while doing nothing to address the real cause of it: the uncaring of those running the facilities. The marketing study is asking all the wrong questions and the answers don't really matter because as long as the pounds care so little about animals that they equate their decision to massacre an entire shelter full of them [with a flippant "woul da, coulda, shoulda,"](#) as the Parish president did in responses to concerns expressed by animal advocates, there is no hope for the animals in that community.

It is NOT the people in the community that are failing the animals and it is not the people in this community that don't care about the animals; they have already expressed their outrage at the killing. It is the pound's fault. What makes the matter more egregious is that the HSUS [program and publicity](#) come off as a vote of confidence and provides these facilities political cover. This, combined with failure to publicly condemn the recent slaughter of an entire shelter full of animals, shows that HSUS is not true to their mission or the animals' best interest.

Pacelle asks for money to fund a study to find out why the public is "bad" by failing to spay/neuter—but when confronted with overwhelming evidence of how bad those running the pounds are, when confronted with a blatant and wholly unnecessary slaughter of animals, there is only deafening silence. HSUS did [issue a statement](#) but it does little more than provide Parish leadership political cover for the widespread killing. Ignoring the question of why virtually all animals were killed when only some of them were sick, it blames the mass killing of 170 animals on "pet overpopulation" and says the "problem of pet homelessness is rampant throughout the nation and it is a challenge that shelters in virtually every community face."

The most criticism it can muster--which stretches reality to the breaking point in order to label it as "criticism"--is its use of the impotent word "unusual" to describe the unnecessary slaughter of almost every single animal in the facility; but HSUS then immediately follows it up by blaming under-funding and under-staffing as if these were the culprits in the decision to kill all the animals, or as if the Parish

president has no role in funding and staffing. In fact, former staff members decried a pattern by local leadership of deliberately cutting corners on staffing when it came to animal care and cleaning.

The mass slaughter is not “unusual,” Mr. Pacelle. It is abhorrent, abysmal, intolerable and outrageous.

It should go without saying that all major groups, especially those whose money is in the coffers of the Tangipahoa Parish Animal Shelter slaughterhouse should issue a statement condemning the pound and its leadership, removing the vote of confidence the earlier funding represented; and acknowledge that they gave money to this pound on promises of a more progressive orientation, but now realize there is little hope of improved lifesaving as long as current leadership remains. That would be the ethical and righteous course of action. They must join the growing voices of outraged activists and rescue groups who condemn the heartless, calculated slaughter. Instead, they offer political legitimacy (“pet overpopulation”) and political cover (“the problem is rampant throughout the nation”).

At the end of the day, without large national groups backing the voices of the activists and rescue groups who did issue statements of condemnation, is it any surprise that the Parish president casually dismissed criticism by accusing animal lovers of “Monday morning quarterbacking”? The very notion, however, is absurd.

The phrase—to “Monday morning quarterback”—is meant to convey the idea that hindsight is 20/20—that it is easy to say what should have been done when the outcome of one particular avenue becomes evident but was not obvious before it played out. When you deliberately kill every animal in a shelter, you know the end result is only one thing—that every animal in that shelter will end up dead (including the cats who were not affected by the illness apparently seen in some of the dogs).

In choosing this course of action which had only one certain outcome, local leadership unequivocally demonstrated how little regard they have for animal life and how unfit they are to lead a shelter that is supposed to be their safety net. Rather than follow the latest, most innovative forms of handling, cleaning and sanitizing to control disease, rather than utilize available rescue groups to save most of the animals, rather than treat those with illnesses who were savable, they chose to kill every animal in the shelter. Nothing could have been a more appalling course of action. There is no need for hindsight. Mass killing has no place in modern sheltering. The action was medieval. And if the Parish president is going to claim ignorance of this, he has no business overseeing a shelter that has the power of life and death over animals.

The animals are being failed.

In Tangipahoa Parish.

And in the halls of HSUS.

Tuesday, August 12, 2008

[Long Day's Journey into Night](#)

The Growing Darkness at Tangipahoa

More evidence is emerging about the mass killing of shelter animals at the Tangipahoa Animal Shelter slaughterhouse. Among the recent revelations:

1. The killing had nothing to do with illness. It was deliberate and by design with illness being used as an excuse;
2. The pound has a history of mass killing all animals in the shelter;
3. Rescue groups were willing and able to save all the animals;
4. HSUS offers to review the matter despite a conflict-of-interest and legitimizing the massacre by blaming the public.

In short, the situation becomes increasingly dark and disturbing as information continues to come out about the mass killing in Hammond, LA.

The killing had nothing to do with illness.

While Parish officials are blaming the mass killing as “necessary” because of an epidemic of disease, the facts tell a very different story. Preliminary evidence points to canine coronavirus as the culprit for why some of the dogs were sick. Coronavirus is not only fairly common, mild and highly treatable, it is self-limiting, meaning it will resolve on its own. Coronavirus can also be treated with hydration, is not life-threatening (except in rare circumstances for puppies in severe cases) and is entirely preventable through vaccination and thorough cleaning/sanitizing. More importantly, it also does not affect cats but all the cats were killed, according to Parish officials, because some of the dogs had diarrhea.

So why were all dogs and all cats slaughtered for a non-lethal problem of the shelter's own creation (poor cleaning, lack of vaccinations)? Don't expect the answer from "the powers that be" anytime soon. Long standing complaints against the shelter include poor care, lack of vaccinations, and sloppy handling and cleaning, all of which is by design as Parish leaders seek to cut corners at the expense of the animals.

Killing occurs despite readily available alternatives.

But there is something even more disturbing and nefarious at work here. Rather than operate a modern program, the process of allowing animals to get sick through shoddy care and then slaughtering all the animals in the shelter appears intentional and by design despite facile HSUS promises of a [“new dawn in animal care”](#) at the Tangipahoa Animal Shelter slaughterhouse. Mass killing of shelter animals is part of the deliberate and ongoing strategy at this [HSUS partner shelter](#). And while it goes without saying that the animals should not have been killed, they literally did not have to be die even if shelter leadership was committed—as they were and despite evidence to the contrary—to emptying the shelter. They could have called rescue groups like MuttShack.

I communicated with [MuttShack rescue in Louisiana](#). This is what they told me:

On March 22, 2006, Tangipahoa had a similar scare. MuttShack responded by sending over 300 vaccines and [medicine]...

About a month later they said they had no alternative but to [kill] everyone anyhow. They needed to clean out the facility [and] disinfect. We worked with [staff] from the shelter who were all trying to save the animals.

We transported the cats to a cat sanctuary and the next day, without—any sleep—we came in with three vans loaded up the dogs, and drove all the dogs and two remaining cats to Atlanta.

We had to beg all over the internet for money for gas, transportation rental vans, vaccines, spay neuter surgeries, and...heartworm treatment.

[But we did it, and t]hey were all adopted...

This gave Tangipahoa a complete opportunity then to disinfect the entire facility, including the grounds and grass areas.

We would happily have done the same had the request been made. I suspect the people we worked with then are no longer employed there.

They did not and the request was not made. As a result, 176 dogs and cats, not under threat, not ill, not suffering, and in no real danger, were needlessly killed in a mass slaughter.

A strategy of mass killing is part of the pound's overall operations strategy.

Even if they had done the right thing and called rescue groups to take the animals (saving animals is always better), it would not be enough to quell much-deserved criticism of this pound facility. A strategy of periodic threats of mass killing unless rescue groups take all the animals is not acceptable.

Compassionately and humanely caring for and finding homes for animals entering the facility, including treating sick animals, is their own responsibility. Rescue groups exist to augment their services, not to replace them. And there is no reason to be in this same position in 2010, as they were in 2006, now 2008, and who knows how many times before when effective, humane, and life-affirming sheltering models exist for this and other shelters to emulate.

Instead of spending precious little money for worthless studies about why poor people don't spay/neuter and instead of fundraising gimmicks like "new dawn" campaigns as HSUS did, the Tangipahoa Animal Shelter slaughterhouse needs to come out of its 19th Century "catch and kill" pound orientation and modernize. That includes vaccination, comprehensive cleaning and disinfection, and programs not just to keep animals healthy, but to find them loving homes. And HSUS is in a unique position to force them to do so.

More self-serving public relations from HSUS.

Instead, HSUS continues to provide political cover of this [HSUS partner shelter](#) by blaming pet overpopulation for mass slaughter at Tangipahoa and blaming pet owners for the fact that the Parish president ordered animals needlessly killed, a point of view that has outraged pet lovers in the region.

As it scrambles to undo some of the public relations damage, the Humane Society of the United States has offered to do an operational assessment of the slaughterhouse. But this begs the question: why would you want an agency which is a partner, promotes the shelter publicly, has promised the public a "new dawn" for the animals at this shelter, and has provided and continues to provide political cover for the killing by blaming others to do a fact finding review or operational assessment? Despite the conflict of interest in protecting their own sordid involvement at this shelter, Parish officials accepted the offer.

Raising our expectations.

I've said it before, but it bears revisiting. What would it look like if groups like HSUS were truly committed to ending the needless slaughter of shelter animals like those at Tangipahoa?

First of all, they would recognize that there is an epidemic of uncaring among shelter leaders which is at crisis proportions and therefore, they would stop providing the political cover and legitimacy represented by the fiction that "*all stakeholders in the animal welfare community have a passion for and are dedicated to the mutual goal of saving animals' lives.*" (Asilomar Accords signed by HSUS, ASPCA, and AHA.) To do so would recognize the reality that rescuers, grassroots activists, feral cat caretakers and those involved in shelter reform nationwide face daily in their struggle to save the lives of the animals in their communities: that our nation's shelters are failing, that they are hostile to calls for reform and innovation, and that in many cases, [they are neglecting and abusing the animals in their care.](#)

This recognition would immediately put an end to this and other misleading rhetoric that these groups are fond of: "we all want the same things," "no one wants to kill," "collaboration [with these shelters/shelter directors] is key," "we need to stop fighting each other and focus on our common enemies." These pronouncements are, first and foremost, a distraction. But, more importantly, they are simply not true. The evidence is overwhelming that many shelter directors find killing easier than doing what is necessary to stop it. And Tangipahoa—an HSUS partner shelter—certainly showed that. When shelter functionaries

kill animals rather than avail themselves of opportunities to save them (e.g., vaccination, cleaning, foster care, working with rescue, keeping cages and kennels full rather than empty), they would rather kill the animals than not kill them. As a result, they become the enemies of those who truly love dogs and cats and find killing them what it is: unethical, outrageous, abhorrent, and intolerable.

In practice, recognition of this fact by the large national groups would mean reporting to the public and shelter administrators that No Kill has been achieved in committed and progressive communities, requires full implementation of the No Kill Equation, and requires the removal of shelter leaders who refuse to do so. It means promoting the communities which have achieved levels of No Kill success that others have not. Instead of functionaries from groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals which kill over 90% of the animals they take in giving workshops at their national conferences as they did this year, they would have representatives from communities which save over 90% of the animals they take in.

At Expo 2009, HSUS' national conference on sheltering, we should see workshops like: "Charlottesville saved 90% of all impounded animals. Learn how you can too." And "Reno reduced shelter rates of killing by over 50% in one year, find out how." We should see seminars like: "Reforming your local shelter" which would include not only a sincere discussion about how shelters currently do not reflect the values of animal lovers and often kill in the face of readily available lifesaving alternatives, but how to force them to change when they refuse to do so willingly, as they often do.

It means arguing in all publications, advocacy efforts, educational materials, media interactions and conferences that No Kill is the only legitimate standard for animal sheltering—and must be embraced by all shelters with sincere commitment and with all deliberate speed.

This means stating unequivocally that, [with the possible exception of those who are irremediably suffering, hopelessly ill or injured, or truly vicious dogs with a poor prognosis for rehabilitation](#), sheltered animals have a right to live, and that shelters must modernize and innovate by replacing century old ways of doing business with the life-affirming programs and services of the No Kill Equation as outlined in the [U.S. No Kill Declaration](#), in order to give meaning to that right.

It means no longer fighting activists who are trying to reform their shelters but assisting them in doing so—even when doing so means fighting an entrenched shelter director that refuses to change. It means no longer rewarding failing shelter leaders with speaking engagements at their conferences, with features in their magazines, with national awards, or—as in Tangipahoa—with tens of thousands of dollars which are squandered.

And it means that when outdated, uncaring, and regressive shelter leaders such as those in Tangipahoa massacre a shelter full of animals for no legitimate reason (and I can think of no reason that would ever be legitimate), that they express their outrage and condemnation rather than provide them the political cover which gives legitimacy to those actions.

It is time for action, not empty words, not meaningless platitudes, not ineffectual campaigns that appear sexy or have vague promises like a "new dawn" which give the illusion of promoting No Kill, but, in reality will do nothing but perpetuate the status quo—or, as in the case of Tangipahoa, actually make things worse for the animals.

That would be a good start. And would truly demonstrate that these groups are "changing" in deeds, as well as words. But it is only a start. That, of course, would be quickly followed with investments of their huge resources in changing communities, in lobbying for change in communities, including a widespread effort to reform shelters, remove entrenched kill-oriented directors, and provide the infrastructure needed to achieve success. That is the kind of approach critically missing from these organizations. And it is critically missing from campaigns like the ASPCA's "Mission: Orange," AHA's "Getting to Zero," HSUS's "New Dawn," and the combined groups' "Asilomar Accords."

These programs will do nothing to end the war against shelter killing. Instead, they carpet bomb local activists working for true reform. By using the HSUS brand to provide legitimacy and political cover to shelter bureaucrats who continue to thwart the will of animal lovers, by giving money to groups which know that simply blaming the public will allow them to forestall necessary changes, No Kill can never be achieved. And the sooner we all realize that, the quicker we can move past empty rhetoric and unfulfilled promises and focus our reform efforts where they should be, precisely because that it is where they will have the most impact: on the very shelters and especially the shelter directors actually doing the killing.

As I result, I too join the chorus of voices calling for a recall of elected officials in Tangipahoa responsible for the carnage. But if we are to really reform this broken system from the bottom up, we need to go further. This movement needs housecleaning from the top down. We need to empty our movement of what sickens us with the same zeal that Parish leaders emptied the pound. It is time to give the boot to pretenders like Wayne Pacelle who legitimize killing and/or refuse to put the full power, prestige, and resources of HSUS to force changes at shelters like the Tangipahoa ~~Animal Shelter~~ slaughterhouse and elsewhere, or force changes in shelter leadership across the country.

We need regime change at all levels of this movement. And we need it now.

Friday, August 22, 2008

["Getting Away With Murder" at Tangipahoa](#)

Officials have finished their "investigation" where they set out to prove that they acted appropriately in ordering [the killing of over 170 animals](#) at the pound in Tangipahoa Parish (LA). The [report](#) of an attorney and "political consultant" who has prior professional relationships with Tangipahoa Parish not surprisingly says the Parish president acted appropriately when he ordered all the animals in the facility killed on August 4. (Initial reports put the [number of animals killed on August 4th at 172, then 176, the report says it was 182, and the computer log shows 204](#). In short, the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. Hint: it is killing animals!) According to the report, the mass killing was "not of extraordinary significance" in light of the fact that the agency does little more than kill animals routinely anyway.

Aside from demonstrating a lack of knowledge about sheltering (e.g., the attorney/political consultant says "*Stray animals* and diseased animals may be [killed] immediately under law" which would violate state mandated holding periods for strays), the report's conclusion is that since the facility kills so many animals anyway, the fact that it killed virtually all of them in a single day is not significant. By setting the benchmark for judging the shelter's actions in light of its past failures, the attorney/political consultant concludes that killing 172 or 176 or 182 or 204 in one day is of no real concern.

Also whitewashed in the report is that employees did not report "any unusual illness among the animals nor anything else out of the ordinary" in the two days prior to the mass killing. The killing was carried out in response to diarrhea, which is consistent and common in poorly performing facilities like Tangipahoa. That this symptom can be evidence of salmonella is hardly a basis to make a determination that all animals should be killed. If that were a legitimate basis, shelters would have carte blanche to kill any animal anytime without any culture, diagnosis, or evaluation of any kind. Diarrhea would be a death sentence at every shelter because it could be anything. But it could also be something as simple as a change in diet or stress. The report also claims that there were some deaths in kennel, which is also consistent and common in poorly performing facilities.

By using fear based conclusions that would make a hypochondriac proud (it *could be* "salmonella" despite the fact that rescue groups report that they "have yet to encounter a rescue person who has ever had a case of salmonella" in the Parish and no tests suggested it); the report says Parish officials did the right thing. The fact that the most likely culprit was canine coronavirus, a relatively mild and self-limiting condition which is consistent with the fact that none of the cats had symptoms, does not alter the conclusions in his analysis.

Friday, September 12, 2008

[News from the Sheltering World](#)

Pit Bulls Left Behind & Other Sordid Stories from Hurricane Gustav

Shelters put out a call for help with dogs displaced by Hurricane Gustav. Well, dogs that did not look like Pit Bulls. Asking for help from other shelters, one SPCA assured them that "None of the dogs are Pitbulls." [Are these dogs not worthy of our compassion?](#) With friends like these...

And while Pit Bulls were being left behind, HSUS was taking credit for the work of others. MuttShack Rescue recently completed a large-scale rescue of animals in New Orleans 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.

But the most disturbing thing of all was the claims of success by groups and Parish officials, when reality in some areas was to the contrary. According to rescuers in Terrebonne Parish, Parish and State officials did not plan adequately, leaving thousands of animals with no food, water, shelter or access to veterinary care. They noted that trucks with supplies did not contain food because food was not requested. Meanwhile, officials at Terrebonne Parish turned away help from outside groups for various reasons and threatened others with arrest.

While Parish officials were assuring everyone that the situation was not "dire," there were thousands of hungry dogs and cats, many without food or water for at least five days, with the date of the return of their owners still unknown. Once again, antiquated state laws and bureaucratic intransigence hampered the ability of rescue groups to send in volunteers and provide direct assistance to the needy animals left behind. And this comes after the "learning curve" of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita.

You can see photographs of the situation by [clicking here](#). (Please note: At least one photograph is graphic).

While others leave Pit Bulls behind, claim success belonging to other groups, or simply do nothing, there are groups working very hard to help all the animals impacted by Hurricanes: Groups like [MuttShack](#), [Feral Cat Consortium](#), [Animal Rescue New Orleans](#), and other "on the street" groups are actually doing the important work of saving lives.

September marks the one year anniversary of the release of my book *Redemption: The Myth of Pet*

Tuesday, September 16, 2008

[Dubious Deals at 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.

Friday, December 5, 2008

[Shelter News From Around the Country](#)

HSUS says "No" to saving the lives of one million shelter animals

HSUS is [discouraging holiday adoptions](#) by telling people to "consider waiting to adopt a pet after the holidays." HSUS states on its website that: "Adoption is the best way to add a new pet to any family. Just wait until after the gifts have been opened and the New Year's corks have been popped. Your decision to wait may be the best give you give your family this holiday season."

Where are the animals supposed to go? As I stated in an [earlier blog about holiday adoptions](#), I believe in thoughtful adoption screening. But as a movement, we have to stop focusing our policies under the false

premise that the public can't be trusted, that the animals are better off dead than in the homes of those who believe that there is no better display of holiday spirit than to open their home to an animal in need.

More importantly, if groups agreed with them, the HSUS position would effectively condemn as many as one million animals to death, because saving the lives of one million animals is this year's goal of the national Home for the Holidays campaign. Thankfully, more and more shelters are not listening to HSUS as the campaign is being supported by thousands of shelters and rescue groups nationwide.

What is also disturbing about the latest announcement is that it follows HSUS' strongest statements ever in favor of No Kill and the announcement that No Kill supporters will speak at their annual conference. But while disturbing, it is hardly surprising given their past positions. That is why in a previous blog about HSUS CEO Wayne Pacelle's statements in support of No Kill, I cautioned that it was nonetheless ["too early to uncork the champagne."](#) One of the reasons I did so is because the statements in favor of No Kill and the inclusion of No Kill advocates as speakers in HSUS' upcoming animal conference were done at the behest and under the direction of Maddie's Fund and that, "it is yet to be determined if these statements and actions signal a deliberate and calculated move by HSUS in a new direction, or whether they are just going along with Maddie's Fund which is funding these endeavors and largely responsible for their content. It is also yet to be determined if Wayne Pacelle and HSUS, when acting on their own without the influence or money of Maddie's Fund, will continue to speak this new progressive and hopeful language."

Unfortunately, Pacelle's first blog after the announcement called for more punitive legislation, which has never succeeded in saving the lives of animals, and in too many cases, has actually exacerbated it. That's *strike one*.

As I stated [in an earlier blog](#): "So if HSUS is going to say they support No Kill, but push a punitive agenda that undermines it, we have a classic case of Chapter 8 of my book Redemption, the chapter called 'Co-option,' where I stated that: 'The real race was not to save lives, but to end public scrutiny and criticism by co-opting the No Kill movement. Business would continue as usual, but it would come with new terminology.' We don't need more of the same, because if all we ever do is all we've ever done, then all we'll ever get is all we've ever gotten. And that just means more killing."

This latest anti-adoption announcement undermines my confidence in Pacelle even further. The one million animals who face death in shelters this holiday season cannot afford to wait until "the New Year's corks have been popped."

Strike two, Mr. Pacelle.

Read the original holiday adoptions blog by [clicking here](#).

February 18, 2009

The Death of Hope at HSUS

In Wilkes County, North Carolina, over 120 Pit Bull-type dogs and puppies seized from a dog fighter were systematically put to death over the opposition of rescue groups, dog advocates, and others. Some of the puppies were born after the seizure. And a foster parent was even ordered to return puppies she had nursed back to health to be killed. As they did in the Michael Vick case, HSUS once again led the charge to have all the dogs, including the puppies, slaughtered.

Before the dogs were killed, rescue groups were offering to help and calling for HSUS and Wilkes County officials to give the dogs clemency unless and until they are individually assessed and a rehabilitation plan, where possible, was devised for each of the dogs. HSUS refused. In reply, HSUS' John Goodwin wrote:

Wilkes County euthanizes 3,000 healthy, adoptable animals a year simply because there are not enough good homes opening their doors to these needy animals. I find it disturbing that the groups clamoring for media attention over these 127 dogs raise no fuss, and offer no assistance, for the other 3,000 dogs put down in that county each year.

Are Goodwin and his cohorts at HSUS out of their minds? Are we back to blaming pet overpopulation? What happened to HSUS' claims of just a few short months ago that that the public does care and is not to blame for their killing, that killing animals in shelters is "needless," that we can be a No Kill nation today, and that "pet overpopulation" is more myth than fact? What happened to their statements that

- "The needless loss of life in animal shelters is deplored by the American public. People deeply love their dogs and cats and feel that killing pets who are homeless through no fault of their own is a problem we must work harder to prevent. They want animals to have a second chance at life, not death by injection."
- "The needless killing of pets by animal shelters and animal control agencies comes at an enormous economic and moral cost."

What happened is that when they made those statements, Maddie's Fund was dangling a check in front of them and the check came with the statement attached for their signature. What is now happening here is that HSUS is, once again, showing us who the animals' true enemy really is.

As I've stated in a previous blog,

Our battle for a No Kill nation is not against the public. It is against the cowards of our movement who refuse to stand up to their colleagues and friends running shelters that are mired in the failed and defunct philosophies that allow (indeed, cause) killing. Our battle is against those who claim to be part of our movement but fail to recognize the killing of millions of animals every year as an unnecessary and cruel slaughter and to call it what it is. It is against those who will not do for the animals that thing which is their solemn duty to do: to change themselves and to demand that their colleagues change, when that is what the situation calls for.

The only thing standing between the system of mass killing we are living under today and the No Kill nation we can immediately achieve is that the leaders of the large national organizations refuse to seize the opportunity to act. Instead they are determined to fail—to ensure that the paradigm they have championed for so long is not upended—by blocking reform efforts which challenge their hegemony; by protecting and defending draconian shelter practices, uncaring shelter directors; and by squandering the potential represented by the great love people have for companion animals.

Instead of championing life, HSUS not only called for the systematic killing of the Pit Bulls, they blamed the very groups expressing concern for the fact that Wilkes County NC continues to needlessly slaughter 3,000 other dogs a year. Moreover, shelter activists have raised a fuss over the killing of other animals. Showing how little knowledge Mr. Goodwin has about the field he is supposedly a part of, that fuss has culminated in the No Kill movement, which has challenged his organization's paradigm of killing.

Indeed, activists have been fighting to modernize North Carolina shelters for years, but have been continuously rebuffed by the sheltering industry every step of the way—even to the point of refusing to stop cruel methods of killing (North Carolina deplorably remains a state which continues to allow the use of a gas chamber). And, when activists do raise a fuss and offer their assistance to help animals, that assistance is often refused by shelters (as [happened in Minnesota just this week](#)). And, just as often, HSUS often ends up condemning the fuss, siding with regressive shelters which refuse to work with animal advocates to reduce killing, as they have in communities across the country.

Every time HSUS defends killing, their antiquated, regressive viewpoints are not only harmful to animals, they make HSUS more and more irrelevant to animal sheltering and more and more despised by those who truly love animals. And they become more out of touch with public sentiment.

In Minnesota, for example, the Animal Humane Society this week [systematically put to death about 120 cats](#) they claimed to rescue from a hoarding situation, even though the cats suffered only minor and treatable medical conditions, and even after No Kill shelters, rescue groups, and even everyday Minnesotans offered to help save the cats. Here are some of the comments the media and rescue groups have been receiving from the public:

- We are just so upset about this. Whether or not they knew about the offers of help, they shouldn't have killed those cats so quickly.
- AHS is an embarrassment to this community with its anachronistic policies and refusal to even consider a different way of doing things other than killing almost 50% of the animals who come through their doors every year. And now you can add straight out misleading and lying to the public, their donor base, to the list.
- I'm so saddened to think that this probably happens even far more often than the media even knows about. We all understand that with that large number of cats, there would be illnesses. I am upset about the lying to the public and unwillingness to respond to the outpouring of support.
- If I were an animal that's the last group of people I would want to be "rescued" by.
- I struggle with finding words to express my anger and disgust with this revelation... This is nothing more than a mass cat slaughter.
- I would of taken one or two of those poor kitties and would have assumed responsibility for their care. I emailed the humane society about it on Feb 13th, and never even got a reply back. It makes me so sad.

While the news media was condemning the action, while protests erupted in front of the humane society, while animal lovers were aghast, and while groups across the country were condemning the action, what did HSUS say? Nothing. They said nothing.

What should they have said? They should have said that the actions of the director in ordering those cats killed violated both the rights of the animals and the trust the public placed in her. As a result, her actions are intolerable and she should be removed. What would they almost certainly have said if they were asked for a comment? If history is any guide, they would have said it was the fault of pet overpopulation.

Moreover, Goodwin's offensive claim that the advocates calling for clemency in Wilkes County were motivated by a "clamoring for media attention" is a classic case of the pot calling the kettle black. HSUS can only see this as a clamor *for media attention* rather than a clamor *to save lives* because that is how HSUS appears to operate. For HSUS, animals do not seem to matter unless they result in a headline and therefore donations for HSUS. For the rest of us, it's the animals that count.

And so it has come to this. While animal lovers around the country can see so clearly what the problem is, Wayne Pacelle and his team at HSUS continue to stick their head in the sand and deny reality—acting like the Bush Administration when it continued to flatly deny that climate change was real even after the alleged controversy had been put to rest and the nation moved on to looking for viable solutions; Or refusing to admit the nation was in a recession, even as the economy began falling to pieces.

If they did not still have the power to cause harm—in fact, they will potentially contribute to the death of 127 dogs—the anachronistic viewpoints they continue to espouse would be merely embarrassing. We would feel nothing but pity for such an out of touch viewpoint. But they do cause harm, just like Bush's environmental and economic policies. And so we must condemn HSUS once again.

While the Republican Party not so long ago was the dominant voice in American politics, Wayne Pacelle would do well to heed the lessons offered by how Bush's obstinacy in the face of reality led to their demise.

February 21, 2009

HSUS Defends Wilkes County Massacre

Earlier this week, rescue groups throughout the country pleaded with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and Wilkes County officials not to put nearly [150 dogs and puppies seized from a dog fighting raid systematically to death](#). Instead, they asked that the dogs be individually assessed and even extended offers of assistance, support, and resources. But HSUS refused, arguing that all the dogs should be killed, including puppies who were born after the seizure and posed no threat to public safety. Not content to simply embrace the killing, HSUS then one went step further. John Goodwin of HSUS attacked the animal lovers, claiming that they were "clamoring for media attention" and expressing annoyance that, in his view, no one is raising a "fuss" over the other 3,000 dogs this particular community unnecessarily kills each year.

Across the country, animal advocates, No Kill shelters, and rescue groups, as well as everyday dog lovers condemned the killings and Goodwin's callous retort about it. Even those outside the humane movement were moved enough to share their overwhelming sadness and anger at the decision. Websites and blogs devoted to photography and other non-animal pursuits interrupted their focus to share their grief over the fate of all those dogs and puppies.

In my own condemnation of the HSUS position, I wrote that Goodwin willfully ignored that many of the groups seeking clemency for the Wilkes County dogs—and the No Kill movement, more generally—*have been* raising a fuss over killing in U.S. shelters—a fuss opposed by HSUS which has often sided with these shelters. I also wrote that,

Every time HSUS defends killing, their antiquated, regressive viewpoints are not only harmful to animals, they make HSUS more and more irrelevant to animal sheltering and more and more despised by those who truly love animals. And they become more out of touch with public sentiment.

Finally, I argued that,

Goodwin's offensive claim that the advocates calling for clemency in Wilkes County were motivated by a "clamoring for media attention" is a classic case of the pot calling the kettle black. HSUS can only see this as a clamor for media attention rather than a clamor to save lives because that is how HSUS appears to operate. For HSUS, animals do not seem to matter unless they result in a headline and therefore donations for HSUS. For the rest of us, it's the animals that count.

Unable to ignore the loud and wide cross section of critics, HSUS has now issued a defense of the killing. Not surprisingly, HSUS takes no responsibility and offers little in the way of thoughtful analysis. The dogs and puppies whose lives were taken be damned, HSUS chooses to present itself as the wounded innocent in the whole affair—the real victims in it's twisted view—by blaming the judge for the "order to [kill] the dogs," even though it was HSUS which testified in court that the animals should be killed, and then defended the decision by attacking rescue groups and No Kill shelters for daring to question the mass slaughter.

Hoping we'll all forget about the puppies killed, HSUS also writes that, "No organization has done more to attack and harm the dogfighting industry than The HSUS." Despite the "We're Number 1" bravado, HSUS' logic in support of the killing comes down to little more than this: According to HSUS, they had to call for the death of puppies who were born after the seizure, who have never known aggression, and

who, in some cases, were raised by loving foster parents because some of the other dogs in the same seizure were aggressive.

In making such a ludicrous argument, HSUS ignores the whole point of the criticism: it wasn't a question of whether a dangerous dog should be put up for adoption no matter how hard HSUS pretends that is what this is about. It was a question of whether the decision that any of the dogs were truly dangerous was made after the dogs were individually and fairly assessed. It ignores that there were puppies killed who posed no threat to public safety, that there were rescue groups willing to provide needed support, and that HSUS has the enormous resources to intervene in a life affirming way, choosing instead to champion the dogs' death. It ignores that the experience with the dogs in the case of Michael Vick undermined everything HSUS thought it knew about the nature of dog aggression. Like in this one, it was HSUS which led the call for mass killing of those dogs after Wayne Pacelle falsely claimed that "Officials from our organization have examined some of these dogs and, generally speaking, they are some of the most aggressively trained pit bulls in the country." In fact, following their actual assessment, only one dog was deemed too vicious to save. In overruling HSUS, the court concurred that most of the dogs were rehabilitatable, and two are now therapy dogs, bringing comfort to cancer patients.

But that is not what takes HSUS' defense of the Wilkes County massacre to its extreme of obscenity. That is reserved for two of the most offensive claims ever to come out of HSUS. First, HSUS claims that we should not ask shelters to do a better job, because they will likely respond by doing a worse one. According to HSUS, if you "impose" the "burdens" of being humane on these shelters, "they may decline to intervene in criminal fighting cases, allowing the dogfighters to continue to operate." In other words, HSUS believes we can't ask more of shelters because if we do, they'll just decide to be even less humane. If we accept this point of view, we can never expect shelters to be effective. We can never demand more from our government agencies. We can never suggest that shelters reflect, rather than undermine, our values. We have to accept that they'll be killing indefinitely. And we have to keep quiet about it or they will be worse than they are now—a wholly unethical and self-defeatist mentality that is grounded in failure. A failure that HSUS seems to believe is permanent and unchangeable.

Second, while HSUS claims to be a leader in stopping dog fighting, they champion the same attitude towards dogs that allows for such abuse—indeed, that perpetuates it: the idea that dogs do not matter; that their lives are of little value and are expendable. Their advocacy that the dogs should be killed undermines the entire principle which should be motivating their anti-dog fighting campaign. Dog fighting is horrible not only because of the pain and suffering of dogs, but because it kills dogs. And killing dogs is the ultimate betrayal—the worst thing we can do to them. To "rescue" them from the worst thing that could happen to them when they are being abused and then to turn around and advocate for that very thing to be done to the dogs makes no sense whatsoever.

In its response to critics, HSUS is essentially saying that the killing of these dogs should continue because there are fates worse than death. And, sadly, too many people who should know better have adopted this point of view, even though it is patently false on its face; and is more so because it incorrectly assumes there are only two choices available: killing at the pound or killing at the hands of dog fighters. Working hard to end the scourge of dog fighting—and to punish the abusers—is not mutually exclusive with saving the lives of the innocent victims. In fact, the moral imperative to do one goes hand in hand with the other.

I am not naive. I understand that *method* of killing is important, and if we lived in a two dimensional world of shadows—if we lived in Plato's cave—where the choice was nothing more than to be killed inhumanely or to be killed in a less brutal way, we would pick the latter each and every time. Although I have called repeatedly for the end of shelter killing, I have also supported efforts to [abolish cruel methods of killing, as in the case of the draconian gas chamber](#)—which shelters in North Carolina, the sight of the current killing, have refused to do. But that is not the choice presented, no matter how hard HSUS tries to pretend it is; nor how many times it repeats it in its statement of apology.

But even if it were true (it is not), while cruelty is abhorrent, while cruelty is painful, while cruelty should be condemned and rooted out, there is nothing worse than death, because death is final. A dog subjected to pain and suffering can be rescued. A dog subjected to savage cruelty can even become a therapy dog, as the Vick case showed. There is still hope. Whereas death is its total antithesis. It is the eclipse of hope. It is forever. Because they never wake up, ever. The worst of the worst—a fact each and every one of us would recognize if it was us facing death.

That basic understanding is, in fact, the very underpinning of our criminal justice system in the U.S. where generally only one offense carries the death penalty because it is an offense not just in difference of degree, but of a difference in kind to every other crime. It is in a class by itself. Only the taking of a life is punishable by death.

But in this case, even this argument by HSUS is a red herring. The choice was not, as HSUS contends, a choice between continued suffering at the hands of dog fighters or death at the pound. This was not the option the dogs faced. Once they were taken into custody by HSUS and Wilkes County officials, more dog fighting was no longer an option. The option was whether HSUS and Wilkes County officials would kill them or whether HSUS and Wilkes County officials would not kill them. Their choice is now well known: they chose to systematically put all the dogs and puppies to death, a choice they defend still.

And so we come back to the first and primary principle of the humane movement: Animal shelters are supposed to be the safety net for animals, not an extension of the neglect and abuse they face elsewhere. Just as there are other service agencies which also deal with human irresponsibility, shelters—like the other agencies—should not use that as an excuse to negate their own responsibility for failing to put in place necessary programs and services to respond humanely, and therefore, appropriately. Imagine if Child Protective Services took in abused, abandoned and unwanted children, and then killed them. We should no more tolerate it for animals.

Because ultimately it comes down to this: it doesn't matter to the dog one whiff who is ultimately robbing them of their life—be it a dog fighting thug, a thug in a suit testifying in court that defenseless puppies should be killed, or a thug cloaked in the mantle of "animal control." Killing is killing, and the tragic end remains the same, regardless of who is pulling the trigger.

February 25, 2009

Wayne Pacelle Under Siege

In response to public outcry over their support and participation in the [Wilkes County Massacre](#), in which the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) first [championed](#) and then [defended](#) the mass slaughter of over 150 dogs and puppies, Wayne Pacelle of HSUS issued an interim new policy of favoring temperament testing of individual dogs seized in dog-fighting cases, and called for "a meeting of leading animal welfare organizations concerning dogs victimized by dog fighting." That meeting has been called for April in Las Vegas. If history is any guide, there is little reason to celebrate as of yet.

To begin with, HSUS did not adopt a policy that all dogs *will be* temperament tested to determine if they are aggressive, only that they will *recommend* that they be, a policy which can be ignored. Second, there has been no discussion over what type of test will be used and how outcomes will be determined, a major flaw in the [temperament testing process used by many shelters](#). Third, there is reason to believe that the outcome in Wilkes County would not have been any different even if this policy were already in place. Last year, Wayne Pacelle claimed that HSUS had tested all the Michael Vick dogs and determined—in his own words—that "they are some of the most aggressively trained pit bulls in the country," a blatant falsehood. In overruling HSUS, the court agreed with non-HSUS reformers that most of the dogs were rehabilitatable, and two are now therapy dogs, bringing comfort to cancer patients. Does it matter if the dogs are killed with or without a temperament test if the test itself is as draconian as HSUS is?

There is also reason to doubt HSUS' sincerity. Regardless of what HSUS says at the meeting or even publicly, they ultimately cannot be trusted to act in a manner consistent with their promises. After all, the support and participation in the [Wilkes County massacre](#) comes after HSUS publicly stated that shelter killing is needless and shelters are not doing enough to save lives. Their defense of it reverted to old patterns of blaming pet overpopulation and even suggesting that we cannot ask shelters to be more humane, because they'll just do a worse job. According to HSUS, if you "impose" the "burdens" of being humane on these shelters, "they may decline to intervene in criminal fighting cases, allowing the dogfighters to continue to operate." In other words, HSUS believes we can't ask more of shelters because if we do, they'll just decide to be even less humane.

In addition, their defense of the needless slaughter of almost every animal at the [Tangipahoa Parish shelter](#) last August which claimed the lives of over 170 dogs and cats came after they promised a "new dawn" of animal sheltering in that region.

And despite a "pro-TNR position paper" they published in 2006, HSUS officials said they "didn't have a problem with humanely killing a stray cat" in April of 2008 after [Randolph, Iowa officials announced a bounty](#) on them, offering residents \$5.00 for every cat they rounded up and brought to the shelter to be killed. (HSUS supported the plan to round up and kill the cats, but not the process suggesting that people might get bit by cats if the cats were not professionally trapped. They then backpedaled there, too, after a massive public outcry, suggesting it wasn't a good idea either way. Sound familiar?)

In addition, even Pacelle's announcement of the meeting suggests a diversionary tactic. The issue which needs to be addressed is not, as he misleadingly claims, a discussion concerning dogs "victimized by dog fighting." We are all in agreement here. The scourge of dog fighting must be ended. We need to pursue and punish dog fighters with all the resources we can muster. The issue is what to do concerning dogs victimized by HSUS and shelters after they have been saved from dog fighters.

As I wrote in a prior blog,

The choice was not, as HSUS contends, a choice between continued suffering at the hands of dog fighters or death at the pound. This was not the option the dogs faced. Once they were taken into custody by HSUS and Wilkes County officials, more dog fighting was no longer an option. The option was whether HSUS and Wilkes County officials would kill them or whether HSUS and Wilkes County officials would not kill them. Their choice is now well known: they chose to systematically put all the dogs and puppies to death, a choice they defend still.

And finally, is such a meeting really necessary? If Pacelle was willing to stand up for what's right, rather than to defend his clearly wrong colleagues, he would not need the symposium. He would know what HSUS policy needs to be and he would ensure that it is followed.

Instead, in response to criticism, HSUS—through [dog killer apologist John Goodwin](#)—chastised groups for making an unnecessary "fuss." And when that callous retort sparked additional furor, they further inflamed public criticism by issuing a [defense of the massacre](#). Everyone's heard some variation of the joke that goes, "how many people does it take to screw in a light bulb?" In this case, the more apt question is: "How many humane groups does it take to figure out that an animal welfare organization should champion the saving, not the taking, of animal life?" The answer, of course, should be "one." It is self-evident. You don't need a meeting to figure it out. But the reality is that the answer is "two" if one of those groups is HSUS: HSUS to get the answer wrong. The other group to tell them what the right one is.

Ever since San Francisco's 1994 seminal achievement when it became the first community in the nation to end the killing of healthy homeless animals in its shelters, HSUS has ignored that success and fought it—and other successes—every step of the way. They continue to regurgitate old clichés about pet overpopulation, continue to support regressive shelters, continue to fight progressive reformers in communities across the country, continue to falsely deny that No Kill has been achieved, and continue to

support mass killings—as they have in Randolph, IA, in Tangipahoa Parish, LA, and in Wilkes County, NC. And ultimately, they don't seem to want to learn from their mistakes.

The public condemnation over their call for killing of all the Michael Vick dogs should have pre-empted the current call for killing, but it didn't. The support for cat killing in Randolph, IA should have been pre-empted by the outcry over their prior feral cat policy, which resulted in a policy switch two years before. It didn't. And they should not have supported the Tangipahoa slaughter because every time they have supported other mass killings at shelters, they've been forced to back down by public outcry. These are not the actions of an agency whose leadership is truly interested in doing the right thing or learning from the past.

But that doesn't mean the show mustn't go on. The meeting has been called, and it should be attended. But we cannot confuse a move for political survival, which this meeting represents, with a sincere desire for change on the part of either Wayne Pacelle or his draconian organization. To do so, is to do so at our movement's own peril.

This is classic social movement theory. Those vested in the status quo, as HSUS is, first ignore reform, as they did in the mid-1990s and lost. Then they fight reform, as they did in earnest in the first half of this decade, and continue to do so in various parts of the country, only to again find themselves on the losing side. The next stage is co-option. That is the stage we are currently in.

The fact is Pacelle and HSUS cannot ignore the will of No Kill advocates anymore and he is only asking for input because he has no choice in the matter. As Christie Keith noted in her [Pet Connection blog](#),

if what HSUS needs is pressure from their donor base, the general public, pit bull advocates, bloggers, animal lovers or other animal welfare organizations to start doing the right thing for these much-maligned dogs ... There seems to be an awful lot of it out there.

This is true. But caution should rule the day. In the past, No Kill advocates stopped the pressure on HSUS in similar campaigns and celebrated victory, only to have discovered they had been hoodwinked by carefully crafted statements and Pacelle's penchant for meaningless pretty words. In 2004, some No Kill groups signed on to a statement of principles called the [Asilomar Accords](#), which were championed by HSUS as a roadmap to "significantly reducing the euthanasia of healthy and treatable companion animals in the United States." Unfortunately, the document allowed for the continuation of policies that resulted in killing, including breed discriminatory actions that culminate in mass slaughters like the one which has sparked the current outcry. In fact, the actions taken in Wilkes County were entirely consistent with the Asilomar Accords—an agreement many No Kill advocates initially supported.

Likewise, some feral cat advocates praised the 2006 HSUS statement on feral cats as a "vision for the future," until it was shown that the statement was riddled with loopholes which allowed killing of feral cats to continue indefinitely—actions consistent with their support of the cat bounty debacle in Randolph, IA.

Time and time again, Pacelle and HSUS have proved they cannot be trusted. Nonetheless, some groups are optimistic. Best Friends welcomed the recent announcement and stated,

There had been more than enough airing of feelings and outrage that the [Wilkes County] dogs were not evaluated prior to being summarily [killed]. It was time to hit the reset button on this in order to move things forward in a constructive way. Mr. Pacelle was open and receptive to what we had to say and we are looking forward to our meetings in April.

As I've stated, I believe the meeting should take place, and I hope their faith is not misplaced. I welcome the involvement of Best Friends in helping set HSUS policy and have very high regard for Best Friends

employees working in this field. So much so, in fact, that [Best Friends speakers](#) will be giving presentations on this topic at the [No Kill Conference](#) this year. There is no falling out with Best Friends. But I do take issue with the notion that it is time to move on from airing outrage or that it is time “to hit the reset button.” One does not necessarily follow the other.

It was mass public pressure from a large number of groups and a wide array of voices which forced HSUS to the table, not a response to a single group's call for change, however large and influential. Admittedly, Best Friends was a major player and took an important and vocal leadership position on this issue; but any appearance of cooperation they get from HSUS is the result of widespread and loud dissent rising up from grassroots activists and rescuers nationwide. It is that clamor which is the only thing that has ever forced HSUS to the bargaining table—and it should not be discouraged.

Moreover, leadership in this movement must reflect the tremendous discontent of those in the grassroots, not seek to prematurely quell it and the vast potential for reform its expression offers. There is no “reset” button for the more than 150 dogs and puppies killed in North Carolina—they are gone forever and we cannot bring them back. It is, therefore, premature to suggest that we move on—not only because HSUS has neither apologized for their actions nor owned up to the obscenity of them, but because the North Carolina incident is a typical example of how HSUS routinely operates, and therefore offers us a cautionary tale as to what we can expect from an HSUS that is anything short of what it is our duty to force it to be: *unequivocal in its embrace of No Kill*.

And force it we will because the power is now ours. We are in a position to dictate the direction of this movement and we must not settle for any compromises. At the meeting in Las Vegas, demands must be made that include, for example, a condemnation of the Wilkes County massacre. To prevent other shelters from citing HSUS' actions and its very public defense of it for their own policies which favor killing, HSUS must publicly reject them in total. The demands must also include:

- *The right* of individual evaluation and consideration for each dog, not merely a *recommendation*.
- It must include a guarantee of clemency for any puppies.
- It must give rescue groups and No Kill shelters the right of access to save the animals, and the right to conduct independent evaluations rather than rely on the flawed results of HSUS or the shelter's own potentially predetermined ones which favor killing.
- It must include an unqualified statement in favor of saving animals that rejects the excuses of the past.
- It must include support of legislation that will give all of these principles the force of law. It should be illegal for a shelter to kill a dog if a rescue group is willing to save him (as it is in California).
- And dogs should not be deemed dangerous without an evaluation and hearing, subject to appeal by any shelter or rescue group.

That is just a start. There are thousands of us and only a few of them. We have found our voice, and recognize the potential its fullest expression can create. *No more compromises. No more killing.*

March 17, 2009

It's Déjà Vu All Over Again

In 1993, both the ASPCA and HSUS opposed a No Kill San Francisco. The ASPCA called it a “hoax” and the HSUS spent years trying to derail it through data distortion and a deliberate campaign of misinformation. Now, both the ASPCA and HSUS are trying to hinder success yet again. If ever agencies were blind to their own interests and bent on their own destruction, it is HSUS and the ASPCA.

The Animal Welfare Commission in San Francisco is considering the [Companion Animal Protection Act \(CAPA\)](#), shelter reform legislation designed to maximize lifesaving by mandating how shelters operate. Ultimately, the question facing San Francisco is not *will it or won't it pass such a law?* The real question is, *will it do it now or will it do it later?* In the end, laws of this nature are inevitable: not just in San Francisco, but in every community; and not just for sheltering, but in every social justice movement. All movements seek to codify expected norms of behavior into law. That is why we have—and embrace—voting rights acts, environmental protection laws, and laws against discrimination based on gender, race, and sexual orientation. Ultimately, such laws are essential to ensure fair and equal treatment and to prevent abuses which can come when those in power are given too much discretion—a discretion which has been abused by shelter directors to unnecessarily kill almost four million animals every year.

[As I reported earlier](#), I was asked to testify by the San Francisco Animal Welfare Commission as part of its “exploration of a policy that would ensure that no adoptable animal (including those that need medical and behavioral intervention but would be adoptable after that) is [killed] in San Francisco shelters.” The effort is directed at saving the last 10 percent of savable animals still being killed in San Francisco’s animal control shelter—Pit Bulls, feral cats, older animals, sick and injured but treatable animals—and it is an achievement easily in reach given that San Francisco has the lowest per capita intake rate of any municipality in the nation (five times less than that of Reno, NV, four times less than Los Angeles, and half the national average) because of a twenty-plus year history of high volume, low-cost spay/neuter. If it chooses, it can easily achieve this worthy goal, even while importing thousands of out of county young and small dogs and cats, as the San Francisco SPCA is currently doing.

Why do the ASPCA & HSUS Fear the Companion Animal Protection Act?

At the meeting, both the ASPCA and HSUS testified (the latter in a letter from Wayne Pacelle) against legislation of this kind. Why? There are several reasons.

First, the ASPCA and HSUS oppose any form of shelter regulation if a shelter director asks them to do so—regardless of what is right or what is wrong, what will help animals or won’t help animals, and despite public desire and clamoring for change. That is why the ASPCA supports the decision by Town Lake Animal Control (TLAC) in Austin, Texas to keep over 100 empty cages daily, even as it claims it has no choice but to kill “for space.” That is also why the ASPCA sided with TLAC when it decided to move the shelter from its currently central location conducive to adoptions to a more remote location in order to build more office space for managers and less kennel space to save animals. That is why HSUS supported the massacre of 145 dogs, including some 60 puppies, in Wilkes County, North Carolina last month even though rescue groups offered to help save them. That is why HSUS supported the shelter in Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana when it decided to kill every single animal in its facility, including cats, when a few dogs came down with a mild corona virus (which is not fatal to dogs and which cats cannot get).

Moreover, the notion of a city passing legislation of this kind is very threatening to HSUS and the ASPCA. It would prescribe how shelters must operate, removing the discretion that allows shelter directors to ignore what is in the best interests of animals and needlessly kill them. And because it would codify the programs and services responsible for dramatic lifesaving success in communities which have already voluntarily implemented them, its success would prove exactly what is needed in order to create No Kill. For example, before killing an animal, the law would require the shelter to certify that:

- (1) There are no empty cages, kennels, or other living environments in the shelter;
- (2) The animal cannot share a cage or kennel with another animal;
- (3) A foster home is not available;
- (4) Rescue groups have been notified and are not willing to accept the animal;
- (5) The animal is not a feral cat subject to sterilization and release; and,
- (6) The director of the agency certifies he or she has no other alternative.

As such, this law provides a course of action so reasonable, so eminently fair, and so easily doable that there should be no controversy whatsoever. Not only because the public would be shocked to know that

such basic and important steps are not commonplace for every animal in every shelter already, but that a law is needed to force shelters to take these simple, ethical steps. Moreover, because San Francisco's SPCA and its Department of Animal Control assured the Commission that they are already doing everything they can to save lives, they should also support this legislation. If they claim to already be behaving in accordance with the law, why oppose it? If the claim is true, the law would not require them to do anything differently. The reason is that they are not doing everything they can as evidenced by the save rate, and thus fear being held accountable. The ASPCA and HSUS' position defends and excuses this resistance—when as the nation's largest animal protection organizations, they should be voices for progress, not champions of those resisting change.

Another reason they are opposed to CAPA is that it will show, in fact, that the killing is the fault of shelter policies and regressive directors—something HSUS and ASPCA will not allow to happen willingly. By changing the way shelters operate, thereby resulting in immediate lifesaving success, the legislation will prove that shelter policies were to blame all along—in opposition to their longstanding assertion that the public is to be blamed for the killing. In fact, it will expose Pacelle and Sayres for what they truly are—bureaucrats who do not care about saving animals, but see their role as protecting a special interest group: shelter directors who do not want to change. Because, in the end, neither Ed Sayres, the President of the ASPCA—who sabotaged No Kill in San Francisco when he was President of the San Francisco SPCA—nor Wayne Pacelle of HSUS could support CAPA because to do so would require them to stand up to their colleagues, something they have proved too cowardly to do in the past.

By contrast, the demands such a law makes on shelters are and would be judged by the public as so reasonable and so successful in achieving their intended aim that for HSUS and the ASPCA to oppose them elsewhere would be politically untenable in other communities that would inevitably follow. This would force Pacelle and Sayres to an even tighter corner than they have already placed themselves through their historically virulent opposition to No Kill—how can they stand before a city council and tell them not to pass a law which leads to No Kill success, in order to defend a kill oriented colleague?

Likewise, when a CAPA-type law passes, and works, it will eliminate any perceived need for the legislation that they, in fact, do promote. Every community will have a choice going forward: continue to pass their leash laws, feeding bans, pet limit laws, and mandatory sterilization laws which have failed in every community, or pass CAPA, and realize immediate life-saving results. It will shine a bright light on just how irrelevant and obsolete HSUS and the ASPCA have become as they cling to outdated, harmful philosophies which have been proven false, no longer make sense, and fail to define a way forward from the quagmire their organizations created.

In fact, during the hearing, when the ASPCA representative referred to No Kill as “radical” and was asked by a commissioner if she really believed that, she realized too late she could not defend her position nor create a smokescreen effective enough, and she was forced to back-pedal. She had not properly anticipated her audience or the issue at hand; namely, that the idea of *not killing* is no longer controversial in San Francisco and hasn't been for over a decade. So her suggestion that No Kill is “radical” to a room full of people who live in the City that proved high rates of lifesaving are possible showed how completely tone deaf the ASPCA has become, especially since she followed a presentation that discussed the attainment of 90 percent save rates throughout the country. The world of animal sheltering is changing rapidly, and rather than learn, evolve, and positively contribute, they continue their attempts to force failed, worn out ideologies on a movement that has moved beyond them.

Reading Between Wayne Pacelle's Lines

Despite Pacelle's unwillingness to compromise HSUS' defense of killing, he has realized he must modify its language embracing it. In the mid-1990s and early 2000s, it was HSUS that argued that shelters should not send animals to rescue groups rather than kill them because sending them to rescue would “stress” them in transport, even though the alternative was death. It was HSUS that argued that people who trap, sterilize, and re-release feral cats were violating state anti-cruelty laws against abandonment and should be jailed and prosecuted. It was HSUS that falsely inflated San Francisco's dog and cat death rates in their

magazine to downplay the success of the No Kill effort, and refused to print a retraction when the San Francisco SPCA pointed out the lie and demanded that they do so.

But the times are changing and so is Pacelle's rhetoric. * Though Wayne Pacelle's letter to the Committee was wrong in its conclusion that the City shouldn't force the shelters to the goal line, he did acknowledge that the success in San Francisco is real and is due to the No Kill Equation. But he then wrote that a community should not put in place a plan to demand and achieve that success because doing so would take the City further away, not closer, to the goal of not killing—a hopelessly irreconcilable contradiction. Under Pacelle's muddled thinking, we shouldn't have voting rights legislation because that will lead to disenfranchisement. We shouldn't mandate civil rights laws because that will lead to discrimination. We shouldn't pass environmental laws because that will lead to more pollution. It not only makes no sense *a priori*, it makes no sense in light of the tremendous success communities which have achieved No Kill experienced by committing to the endeavor whole-heartedly as this law would dictate.

Because challenging No Kill outright is no longer politically possible for these agencies, both the ASPCA and HSUS now have to use a less obvious, more subtle ways to fight San Francisco making further progress. They have to make it sound like they were on board all along, while simultaneously pushing the same agenda of hindering lifesaving that they always did.

That is what makes Pacelle's spin so cleverly crafted. Now that leadership has changed and those in charge do not want to save the remaining animals that are at risk in the City, Pacelle now supports the SPCA leadership. Were the situation different, were the San Francisco SPCA promoting this legislation over the objection of animal control, Pacelle's letter would have challenged the SPCA's lifesaving claims, just as HSUS always has.

In the end, however, while HSUS and the ASPCA have not changed, the movement has. And this change offers the San Francisco Animal Welfare Commission a chance for its own redemption.

A Second Chance to Do the Right Thing

In 1993, Richard Avanzino stood before the Commission and asked for its support in forcing animal control to allow the SPCA to save animals in the custody of San Francisco Animal Care & Control (ACC). Avanzino was offering to save every healthy and thousands of sick and injured but treatable animals from animal control's death row by bringing them to the SPCA for adoption. ACC refused. Its leadership argued that they should be allowed to continue to kill animals because the threat of a death sentence is what kept people from surrendering animals to the shelter. Sadly, the Commission refused to act. Given the number of lives that have been saved by the SPCA since, and how obscene it was for the leadership of animal control to demand that killing continue, we look back in astonishment that there was ever any opposition at all, that ACC leadership felt confident enough to voice that position, and that the Commission actually bowed to it. How dare animal control say no. And how was it that the Commission failed to act in support of the animals? What was so controversial about mandating that Animal Control give the San Francisco SPCA animals it was planning to kill, but the SPCA wanted to save?

Likewise, were the City of San Francisco to pass legislation prescribing how shelters in the City must operate in order to maximize lifesaving, it wouldn't be long after they were passed that their precepts would come to be regarded as sacrosanct. In the future, we will likewise look back with bewilderment as to what all the controversy and fuss was about.

Will the San Francisco Animal Welfare Commission take what may now seem to some like a bold leap, but which history will judge to be such an obvious necessity as to leave us astounded by the hesitancy? Will they set aside their hesitation—and in the case of the San Francisco SPCA and San Francisco Animal Control representatives on the Commission, their personal loyalties—and look at the issue for what it is: granting animals the protections they need and deserve, and by doing so, help the city of San Francisco once more attain its reputation as the crown jewel of the No Kill movement? Or will the Commission delay action while other communities continue to move confidently forward? Will they wait to act until

public dissatisfaction at the unnecessary deaths of hundreds of animals every year in San Francisco grows even greater? Will they wait until the fight becomes more bitter and divisive as San Francisco animal lovers watch other cities throughout the nation continue to achieve and then supersede San Francisco's lifesaving? Will they wait to act until San Francisco is no longer hailed as the progressive city where no healthy animals are killed, but lamented as a regressive city where they are still killing animals who can and should be saved?

If history is any guide, we may be in for a long fight.

April 11, 2009

April 11, 2009

Las Vegas, Round 3

Yesterday afternoon, just before they released the new agreement with HSUS on the issue of seized Pit Bulls, I spoke on the telephone with Best Friends. In trying to be fair to Best Friends and what they hoped to accomplish, I agreed to remove my prior posts on the issue and to judge the agreement on its merits.

I am grateful that Best Friends challenged HSUS on this and tried to come up with a "win" for the Pit Bulls. I welcome the involvement of Best Friends in helping set HSUS policy and have very high regard for Best Friends employees working in this field. But, in the end, I have serious reservations about whether this will truly signal a substantive shift in HSUS policy and a lot of what HSUS said at the meeting is still very disturbing.

For example, John Goodwin, HSUS' Dog Fighting Czar, started the meeting defending HSUS' actions in Wilkes County by reiterating his past statements that if we ask more of shelters, they will do less. In other words, we shouldn't ask shelters to try to save the dogs, otherwise they won't get involved:

It's a deterrent to going after dog fighting what you do with the animals. If they can euthanize them, it facilitates prosecution.... Why should these dogs get to the front of the line?

In addition, HSUS initially said it would not change its law enforcement manual that recommended all dogs be killed saying that *"We cannot take back what is out there"* even though Best Friends indicated that they had to. HSUS continued to resist, claiming that *"only 2,000 people read their [law enforcement] manual, so that is not a big impact,"* ignoring that the number of people is less relevant than who those people are (in this case, those with the power of life and death over the dogs). But it appears that Best Friends carried the day in subsequent negotiations on this issue as reflected in the final policy statement.

During the meeting as well, HSUS—the richest humane organization in the country which an annual budget in excess of \$100 million per year—claimed that saving these dogs was a resource issue and that the public would not embrace these dogs, even as the Michael Vick dogs proved otherwise. And, once again, to their great credit, Best Friends chastised them for *"their language [which] did contribute to the [public's] perception"* and urged them to take a *"a leadership role in changing the language and perception rather than just giving in to it."* And as Best Friends further stated—and as HSUS fundraisers are no doubt well aware—*"resources are not the problem they at first appear, ask the public for support,"* to which HSUS responded that the *"rhetoric"* of No Kill advocates was hurting their effort to raise funds.

And, in the end, HSUS did not even want to issue a new policy statement, but was pushed to do so by Best Friends:

Best Friends: *As to a policy change, is there anything we can take away?*

Wayne Pacelle: We wanted to have a meeting first before we make any decisions.

Best Friends: Are we anticipating a statement?

Wayne Pacelle: No, no statement.

Best Friends: This meeting is not a secret so there needs to be some agreed upon ... [trails off]

Wayne Pacelle: We can work with you bilaterally on that.

After continued negotiations, HSUS agreed to two issues and a subsequent working group to continue the dialog:

- *The HSUS has a new policy of recommending that all dogs seized from fighting operations be professionally evaluated, according to agreed upon standards, to determine whether they are suitable candidates for adoption. Dogs deemed suitable for placement should be offered as appropriate to adopters or to approved rescue organizations. The HSUS will update its law enforcement training manual and other materials to reflect this change in policy.*
- *The groups agree that all dogs should be treated as individuals, and they are the true victims of this organized crime. They also agree to support law enforcement and animal control agencies when decisions must be made regarding the dogs deemed unsuitable for adoption and in cases when rescue organizations and adopters are unable, within a reasonable timeframe, to accept dogs from such raids that have been offered for adoption.*
- *The organizations will form a working group to develop future protocols for cooperation in addressing the needs of dogs seized in raids, such as how to assist with the housing of fighting dogs, how to conduct professional evaluations, and how to screen potential adopters.*

Wayne Pacelle posted his interpretation of the agreement on his blog, where he admits the outcome for many of the dogs may be the same:

In the past, animals seized from these operations have been routinely euthanized. This may still be the outcome for the animal victims of dogfighters, but we agreed as a number of groups that all of us should do our best to evaluate dogs seized from these operations and adopt those dogs who can be saved.

It's all vague. The agreement. Pacelle's statements. They are vague. And, as a matter of course, vagueness isn't enforceable. Vagueness doesn't help assure outcomes. Vagueness allows for differing interpretations. Vagueness gives plausible deniability. Vagueness dissipates anger, but does not live up to the hopes of animal lovers. As such it stifles criticism, without offering anything really bankable and concrete in return. And that really bothers me.

I want to be wrong. I want to believe that the new policy will signal a radical new shift in HSUS policy over these dogs—a policy which will, in fact, result in lifesaving, rather than continued killing. And if it does, I will be the first to admit it. That is, after all, what we are fighting for.

But I don't think that is likely to happen though, because for it to happen, I have to ignore that HSUS claimed to give the Michael Vick dogs individual consideration and determined—falsely—that they were some of the most vicious ever seen.

In order for the policy to be significant, I have to believe that even if the vague promises have teeth I can't quite fully see, that those reforms will be fully and faithfully implemented by the same HSUS team which has time and time again broken promises and championed killing: Wayne Pacelle, John Goodwin, and those two HSUS staff who told the court in Wilkes County that all of the dogs were a threat to public safety, including nursing puppies.

I have to ignore a continuing pattern where HSUS says one thing, does another, makes promises, and then subsequently breaks them 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.

I also have to accept, like at least one of the rescue groups present, that it is acceptable that dogs *may* be evaluated and adopters and rescue groups *may* only have a small number of days to pick these dogs up or HSUS will be able to say they'll "have to" kill them. Why is killing the automatic default if rescue groups can't save them? HSUS is the largest, best funded humane organization in the country, with the largest number of animal loving members. Why can't HSUS save them? It is, after all, not only what their supporters would expect of them, but what HSUS leads them to believe they in fact do.

But during the meeting, one of the other group representative (*not* Best Friends) responded that "no one is asking for HSUS resources for these dogs," which I simply do not understand. And yet another stated that, "There are limited resources, we are not trying to save them all." Referring to a dog fighting bust in Oklahoma, where roughly 130 dogs were killed, they stated: "Thirteen out of 145 were saved. But we were happy with that outcome." Happy with that outcome?

Sure, it will mean the world for those dogs who make it. Sure, thirteen is better than none. But are we to sweep the rest under the rug? Why is up to rescue groups—limited by foster homes and resources—to do most of the saving and not the richest animal protection organization in the country which actually participates in the dog fighting bust and ostensibly raises the most money from the fundraising which inevitably follows?

In order to embrace the policy, I also have to ignore that the 2004 Asilomar Accords were also released by HSUS to great fanfare and billed as the future of sheltering that would help us "reach the ultimate goal of ending the euthanasia of healthy and treatable companion animals," but their vagueness allowed for policy after policy which revealed that, in fact, the opposite is true. I have to ignore that the 2006 "pro-TNR" statement of HSUS was then followed up with HSUS fear mongering about feral cats over bird flu (telling people not to rescue cats but to call animal control—agencies with a history of killing—when they see a stray) and a statement from HSUS that it did not have a problem with rounding up and killing stray cats in Randolph, IA in 2008. I have to ignore that despite their 2008 statement embracing No Kill in conjunction with Maddie's Fund, that HSUS then asked the court to slaughter each and every Wilkes County dog, including nursing puppies. I have to believe the following were aberrations that do not accurately reveal the "real" HSUS:

- In 2002, HSUS rallied around the New York City animal control shelter even after the comptroller's audit found "a number of allegations of animal neglect and abuse." The report found that not only were animals wrongly killed, but "many animals didn't have regular access to water and were often left in dirty cages." Despite nearly 70 percent of dogs and cats being killed, HSUS defended the shelter, which called those statistics "useless."
- In 2003, HSUS supported an animal control shelter at a time when a No Kill agency was poised to take over sheltering operations in Rockland County, New York, even after an auditor substantiated allegations of high rates of shelter killing and other deficiencies that were not corrected after a year. According to No Kill advocates, HSUS excused the failure of the agency

“to correct the worst deficiencies noted by an outside inspection the year before [despite that such] deficiencies [also] violate[d] each and every one of Defendant HSUS’ own published program and policies for ‘Every Animal Shelter.’”

- In 2003, HSUS also opposed a rescue group’s efforts to get pre-killing notification from animal control in Page County, Virginia, so that they could save the dogs, calling the request “unreasonable.”
- In a September 27, 2006, speech at a Eugene, Oregon, town hall meeting on the issue, HSUS sent a representative who claimed No Kill was a sham, killing was necessary, and the blame belonged with the irresponsible public.

I have to ignore the August 2008 slaughter in Tangipahoa where shelter leadership decided to kill all dogs and cats for what was ostensibly a mild, self-limiting coronavirus (which cats cannot get), but which HSUS legitimized by blaming the public. I have to ignore the 2009 Wilkes County massacre.

And I just can’t do that. It would not be rational.

On the morning of the Las Vegas meeting, I sent an e-mail to Pacelle informing him of what I hoped would come out of it:

- All dogs have the right of individual evaluation. Dogs shall not be deemed dangerous without an independent evaluation.
- No Kill shelters and rescue groups have a right to conduct independent evaluations of the dogs, rather than rely on the results of others.
- Puppies will not be killed.
- Rescue groups and No Kill shelters have the right of access to save the animals, and it shall not be permitted for a dog to be killed if a rescue group or No Kill shelter is willing to accept the dog into their sanctuary or adoption program.
- Shelters shall make non-aggressive dogs available for adoption.
- HSUS shall assist in the adoption of dogs, through finances, boarding the dogs when necessary to avoid killing them “for space,” and utilizing its vast media and donor resources.
- Legislation that will give all of these principles the force of law shall be pursued. It should be illegal for a shelter to kill a dog if a rescue group is willing to save him (as it is in California).

In reading the new joint statement, there is no *right* of evaluations. There is no stated commitment to save all the underaged puppies. There are no independent evaluations. Rescue groups do not have a right to save these animals, regardless of what the HSUS evaluation shows. And there is no commitment for HSUS to use its significant resources in order to expand the adoption opportunities of these dogs. Instead, we got, what reads to me, to be more HSUS equivocations: “recommending,” “should be,” “approved” rescue groups, “reasonable” time frame, and “future protocols.”

We got a policy that says, in essence, that these dogs should not automatically be killed, but that HSUS will *recommend* that they be given individual consideration and equal opportunity. But what does that mean? Does it change the outcome for the dogs? Does it mean they live instead of die? Are we really going to settle for an unenforceable promise of equal opportunity, which in too many communities means little more than an equal opportunity to be killed? Are we really going to trust that the same people who brought you HSUS’ defense of killing in Tangipahoa, LA and Wilkes County, NC are going to fully champion the dogs going forward, especially since they resisted a new written policy and began the process by defending their actions?

I am not blind. I realize what has resulted is better than the automatic kill policy, and that is certainly progress. But I also know that doing better is true by definition. You couldn’t do worse. It isn’t possible. If only one dog is saved going forward, that’s improvement over automatic destruction. And by an

Update: The following letter was sent from the director of the Humane Society of Indianapolis to Wayne Pacelle of HSUS today:

From: John Aleshire
Subject: A critical Indianapolis issue

Dear Wayne and Colleagues:

...I bring to your attention a serious issue in Indianapolis that is being made much worse by the perceived support and encouragement from HSUS, most notably through Desiree Bender. The facts are these:

- A rogue member of the Indianapolis City County Council, Mike Speedy, is preparing to introduce an "aggressive dog ordinance" later this month during a Council meeting. He is targeting pit bulls ONLY for such things as mandatory spay/neuter, special permits, proof of liability insurance, and a limit of 2 such dogs per owner.
- Councilman Speedy has spoken openly and directly to the president of our board citing the support and the encouragement of Desiree Bender... This implies the full support of HSUS.
- Councilman Speedy has spoken on a [recent radio program that he is "working with HSUS" on this ordinance](#) and gives the impression your organization is helping him. [To listen to this radio interview you should go under "Garrison" and click "4/13 Mike Speedy discusses dog legislation. At 3 minutes 50 seconds into the interview he says HSUS is working closely with him to craft this legislation]

To say that we find this incredulous would be the understatement of the year. I speak for a highly organized and focused animal welfare community in Indianapolis when I say we had this proposal and any type of BSL off the radar screen with local legislators. Even the Mayor's office issued a statement opposing any sort of BSL. Now that HSUS seems to be involved in this, we have a much more difficult time making sure this does not pass. It will now take many more hours of work.

Additionally, if Councilor Speedy does have any backing from HSUS, your organization will be completely at odds with the entire animal welfare community in Indianapolis. In all of my dreams, I never thought I would face the prospect of fighting HSUS to protect dogs and dog owners in our community.

So I ask:

- Does HSUS support any kind of legislation like this? If so, please tell me why on earth you would.
- Does HSUS NOT support this type of legislation? If so, I respectfully insist on a statement to that regard to me within 24 hours before we issue our opposition statement to the City County Council.
- Exactly why is Desiree Bender involved in matters in Indiana? Our issues are much different than the issues Little Rock faced. Would someone tell her to stay in Arkansas?
- Is our collective position here that this ordinance be stopped and NOT re-written. It is a knee-jerk reaction that has not involved any expertise from the animal welfare leadership.