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Critic speaks against HSUS

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In late August, following the defeat of AB1634, an Assembly bill calling for mandatory spaying and neutering of dogs and cats, I ran an interview with Wayne Pacelle, president of the Humane Society of the United States.

He touched on a variety of issues, including his critics. Patti Strand, director of the National Animal Interest Alliance, asked me to publish her rebuttal to the Pacelle article. The rebuttal was delayed several weeks because of a death in her family.

NAIA is based in Portland, Ore. I take neither side in this debate, but note only that there are deep divisions in the animal rights movement.

Her rebuttal is as follows:

Wayne Pacelle is correct to rank the NAIA as one of the most prominent critics



Patti Strand is the director of the National Animal Interest Alliance.

of the HSUS. We wear that label with honor, many of our members believing HSUS is corrupt to the bone. This corruption comes down to three major elements.

First, HSUS allows its financial supporters - ordinary, animal-loving Americans - to believe it spends an enormous annual tax-free budget of \$123 million on caring for animals, when its real agenda is passing extremist legislation.

Second, HSUS calls itself a mainstream advocacy group, hiding or downplaying the fact that it has

an extremist agenda. HSUS is all about promoting vegan diets - no meat, no dairy - and ending traditional human-animal relationships across the board, from agriculture to biomedical research.

Third, HSUS constantly engages in deceptive propaganda, half-truths and outright lies in well-funded media campaigns to win its political and legislative battles. But they are not held accountable for their tactics because they are a nonprofit group that enjoys political free speech protections.

NAIA believes it is our responsibility, as animal experts and proponents of true animal welfare, to point out the facts. What qualifies us to know fact from fiction? NAIA is rapidly becoming the nation's leading advocacy organization for animals and the people who actually care for them.

Our members include individuals who interact with animals regularly in a wide variety of settings. We are pet owners, farmers, researchers, animal trainers, biologists, sportsmen, animal caretakers, dog and cat breeders and enthusiasts, educators and entertainers.

Our members have earned their credentials by working with, and in many cases living with, animals, not by reading philosophical treatises or emotional propaganda. We support the responsible, traditional and humane use of animals in agriculture, biomedical research, education, leisure and recreation, entertainment and companionship. We support and advocate reasonable, effective and enforceable laws that ensure the humane treatment of animals and provide penalties for animal abuse.

We support the rights of others to disagree with our views but not to employ defamation and propaganda to force their views on others. To recognize HSUS' deception and sit idly by would be to shirk our responsibility not only as animal experts but as citizens; for we believe the HSUS is destroying the mainstream animal protection movement.

The shelter issue

Mr. Pacelle also seems baffled that anyone would go after HSUS for not having shelters because as he stated, "We never said we run - local animal shelters." This is vintage HSUS. They call themselves a humane society and then blame the public for being confused.

By calling itself the Humane Society of the United States, HSUS rides into every situation on a "case of mistaken identity" - an identity that, oops, just happens to raise millions of dollars: the mistaken impression for many Americans being that it is a humane society rather than a giant propaganda, lobbying and fundraising machine.

When citizens notice that HSUS' carefully crafted image is at odds with reality and say so, HSUS responds with another opportunistic spin, saying that their critics are just people "who don't really care about animals."

Using that logic, maybe humane societies around the country don't really care about animal welfare either. Many of them have begun putting disclaimers on their Web sites urging their donors not to confuse them with the HSUS.

As Pacelle himself stresses, HSUS is a lobbying group. Instead of representing the humane values of the American public, the well-oiled lobby and propaganda machine of HSUS virtually assures that the voting public will be systematically deceived whenever they're asked to vote on an HSUS-backed measure. The history of successful HSUS ballot initiatives is a history replete with after-the-event self-flagellation and revulsion by people who recognized later that they were duped.

To us it appears that the priorities of HSUS, as former employees have publicly written, are power and money, and that acquiring both justifies the means. That's where the willingness to deceive comes in. These folks should make Pinocchio blush.

Alleged strategy

When HSUS sets out to do a ballot initiative, as it plans for next year in California, they don't just come to town and start promoting their opinion. Nor do they publish a notice informing voters that as vegans they oppose the

consumption of meat, dairy, and even eggs on their anti-farm ballot initiatives. Such a statement might raise questions by voters.

Instead, HSUS conducts sophisticated polling to uncover exactly which messages will work, targeting urban audiences who know little about husbandry and who just happen to live in the most populated areas where a media buy will go a long way. Then, they run one deceptive ad one after another, showing heart-wrenchingly gruesome images, often from foreign countries or showing practices from decades ago, even ones already illegal.

Worse yet, they promote half-truths in support of legislation that in many cases harms animals, even though these bills further the political goals of HSUS. The horse slaughter bill and most of the anti-farming initiatives fall into this classification. HSUS may counter that large companies do major polling and launch advertising campaigns too, prior to introducing new products - but there is a big difference.

The difference is this: When corporations market new products, the public at least recognizes that someone is trying to sell them something. And there are at least some laws that govern how much blue sky can be sold along with the product.

In the case of HSUS, PETA, and other fellow travelers in animal rights, the public only thinks they're regulated and required to be reasonably truthful. The public doesn't realize that political speech is far more protected than commercial speech. Thus, HSUS can say pretty much what it wishes and get away with it.

In the HSUS world of "when did you stop beating your wife" politics, it's basically Defamation For Dollars. They understand social marketing and use it to deceive the public into voting away their rights, their economic best interests, and tragically, the welfare of the animals the public thinks they are voting to protect.

Keep in mind that HSUS is planning a campaign in California that will affect the poultry, pork and beef industries. If it follows suit, it will harm not only California consumers but also the animals themselves.

Tougher for horses

As the American Veterinary Medical Association wrote earlier this week regarding the misguided HSUS campaign against horse slaughter. Efforts by groups calling for an end to horse slaughter, such as the Humane Society of the United States, have led to the closure of the three remaining processing plants in the United States.

Now, as the AVMA has repeatedly warned, horses are being abandoned in the United States or transported to Mexico where, without U.S. federal oversight and veterinary supervision, they are slaughtered inhumanely.

"The reality is, the HSUS has done nothing to address the real issue here, and, in fact, by seeking to ban horse slaughter, they have made things significantly worse," says Dr. Mark Lutschtaunigm, director of government relations for the AVMA. "If they really wanted to do something productive to improve the welfare of horses, they would address the issue of unwanted horses in the United States."

And the half-truths and lies aren't confined to pushing bad policies in the United States. Internationally, HSUS was refused entrance into the 2000 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, for filing false accusations about CITES member nations.

In the state of Washington, the HSUS-driven Proposition 713, an anti-trapping ballot initiative, was so misleading, the legislature voted to overturn it when it became obvious that the voters had been misled.

Floridians saw their pork industry - small as it was - wash out entirely because of the cost of equipment changes required by the passage of their anti-gestation confinement, Proposition 204, a measure designed to eliminate gestation crates used by farmers to protect the lives of piglets.

Next year

When the HSUS-inspired ballot initiative is forwarded next year, NAIA and its members will be proud to stand with California farmers.

Our membership includes veterinarians, wildlife biologists and other animal scientists, dog and cat breeder/enthusiasts, animal trainers, farmers, ranchers, and others with hands-on experience in animal husbandry and care.

We are fighting a David vs. Goliath battle here. HSUS has regional branch offices all over America and over \$100 million to fight, mislead and deceive. We at NAIA are a small, mostly unpaid band of hard-working, hands-on animal people.

Truth, hands-on knowledge, understanding and fair mindedness make us proud of the company we keep. We are proud that many cities around the country call on NAIA for expert guidance to draft sensible animal laws. And we feel validated to be on the same side of the fence as state and federal law enforcement in the animal welfare debate. We are also proud to stand with the American farmer, the legions of dog fanciers, and others who are the real backbone of the mainstream animal welfare movement.

None of them engage in the systematic misrepresentation of issues for profit and power that we see occurring as standard practice in HSUS and other conflict fundraising groups.

Unfortunately, it's the average, uninformed American citizen who winds up at the short end of the stick, thanks to the machinations of HSUS.

But I can tell you this: the animal welfare movement is onto them. And we're going to keep digging in our heels and telling the truth in our loudest possible voice.

Tom Hennessy's viewpoint appears Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. He can be reached at (562) 499-1270 or by e-mail at scribe17@mac.com