

HSUS has an ambitious plan for a federal animal protection agency

Sara Amundson, executive director, Humane Society Legislative Fund speaking at The Future of Animal Law Conference March 31, 2007

Why do we see that there is a climate for change or possibility for a US Animal Protection Agency? More than 62% of homes in this county have companion animals. That is a significant rise in the percentage from even 5 years ago. What about our constituency? Animal organizations literally have more than 12 million members and supporters in this country which factors into a significant number in six digits in some cases per state and a little smaller per congressional district. When you have that sort of army there are few other special interest organizations that can approximate the power that you can generate; I can only think of two, the NRA and the AARP.

I think it is quite demonstrable that animal protection advocates have a growing public policy influence and by that if you take a look at the ballot initiatives that have passed since 1990 there are about 22 that are pro-animal. If you take a look at federal and state law, we have seen such a significant surge in pro-animal legislation that the numbers are not even quantifiable at this point. And it covers the gamut from research animals to farmed animals to our companion animals across the board.

What about technology? The environmental protection advocates used print and broadcast media extremely well to get out a very constructive story. What do we have today? We've got the internet, we've got YouTube, we've got all news all the time which means every exposure of particularly grievous definitely demonstrates why it is we need to take action.

Much like the EPA, we're in a position where we are still at war in this country, but in addition to that we've got relative prosperity at least in the area where folks are giving animal issues serious consideration.

I don't see President George Bush being the instigator for a United States Animal Protection Agency. However, our opportunity is to create pressure within an administration subsequent to this one that will have a sincere impact in moving forward in this area.

What would it look like? This is a snapshot because it does not possibly cover every federal agency or certainly every program within the federal agency. But when you take a look at this, look at the plethora of agencies we are contending with on an individual basis as it is. Would it not provide us an opportunity to first and foremost thru the President of the United States have a sincere impact on who the top administrator of the US APA would be; and then also influence bureaucrats who may have been stalwart in supporting our issues or difficult in not supporting our issues over the years. By having the political will to really engage in ensuring that we've got a single area to provide appropriations for and a single area to lobby for support.

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