

What is the Humane Society of the United States?

By Christopher Aust
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I was rather amazed at the number of people who wrote to me about my opinions regarding the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) when I did my last few articles. Then again, maybe I shouldn't be. Before about two weeks ago, I myself was rather ignorant as to the real goals of HSUS, and where their, (actually your) money goes. As I always do though, I decided to educate myself about them.

I also conducted a poll of 100 average people. Just the average Joe in the street. 94% of the people thought HSUS ran the local shelters in their community. 4% knew about their other programs and the remaining 2% had no idea who they were. Of the 94% all said they would donate to HSUS based on what they knew about them. I'm betting HSUS is banking, literally, on these types of individuals.

I also went online and found some rather interesting, at times quite scary, information on several web sites. I would have interviewed a HSUS representative, but after last week's newsletter, I got an email from one that was little more than hate mail and very offensive!

Founders

Coleman Burke, then president of the American Bible Society, Cleveland Amory and Helen Jones, founded HSUS in 1954. As far as I have been able to tell, Mr. Burke served as their President until 1970 when John Hoyt, a Presbyterian minister, took over as President and CEO until 1996.

Until just a few months ago, the President and CEO was Paul Irwin, a Methodist minister. The current CEO and President is Wayne Pacelle who admittedly has had ties with some radical (and I mean radical) animal rights groups in the past.

Now, is it important I mention the religious background? Maybe and maybe not. What I noticed though is the organization, at least to me, has an evangelical feel. Is this a bad thing? No. I don't see why unless you are running the finances in a manner similar to Jim and Tammie Faye Baker! That sure is the way it looks to me.

Officers and Directors

HSUS is an organization with their primary focus being animals. As I reviewed the names and titles of the Board Officers and Directors, I found it curious they had no DVM's (vets) on either. They have three MDs', three PhDs' and six attorneys. Am I the only one that finds this odd? Plenty of lawyers, but no vet. Hmmm...Maybe it's just a typo.

Comparative Financial Operations Report

When I conducted my interview with Kathy Bauch a few weeks ago, she refused to answer any questions regarding HSUS' finances for a "newsletter." She did offer to send me their 2003 financials though. This is what they send whenever some one has questions about their finances. As I mentioned last week, if it was similar to what they have online, it would be vague and difficult to decipher. What I got was much more.

What I received is their 2003 Annual Report. It is a twenty-one page "report" that was obviously very expensive to print. Tucked way in the back is exactly what I expected.

A vague and difficult to read one page financial report. The rest appears to me to be a very expensive sales letter and nothing more, complete with a postage paid envelope to send in your donation.

Now you might say, "So what? They have to promote themselves." I agree. However, this publication has six pages of calendar quality photos of nothing but animals. Two and a half pages of self-glorifying articles from HSUS staff, none of which was necessary. How much donor money could have been saved by deleting this junk from the thousands and thousands of these reports they printed?

According to the Comparative Financial Operations Report for 2003, the HSUS has \$116,205,882.00 in total liability and net assets. Over \$5,000,000 of that is in cash and cash equivalents, and another nearly five and a half million in receivables. They also have nearly \$93,000,000 in market value investments. Not too bad.

In 2003, in revenue, additions and transfers, HSUS made \$76,923,670. Of that amount, sheltering programs received \$10,551,527 and it was shared with animal habitat and wildlife programs. Now, assuming it was an even split, sheltering programs received \$3,517,175.66

Now that's a lot of money, but not when you consider a good sized shelter can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to run, three million is really a drop in the bucket. They spent \$21,145,769.00 in fundraising and membership development. Six times what they put into their shelter programs, which is what most people I talked to think HSUS does with the money donated to them.

Providing Help or Selling It

I'm not sure what they spent the money on for their shelter programs, but I will assure you they didn't fund any shelters. In fact, they charge shelters and Animal Control offices for their assistance and instructional material. I have been able to find little and or nothing HSUS doesn't charge for when it comes to helping a shelter and their educational programs.

For instance, let's say you or your town runs an animal shelter that is struggling for one reason or another, which most are, HSUS is ready to come in and help. For between \$4000.00 and \$20,000.00 they will send their experts to your shelter through their Animal Services Consultation Program. The fee depends on the size of the agency and the complexity of its programs, charged on a sliding scale based on your agency's resources. In other words, the more you have, the more they'll take.

Youth Programs

Now, let's go back to our youth. You're in middle or high school and want to start a club to promote rescue and do things to help companion animals. HSUS can help you with that, too. Just go to humaneteen.org. There you can buy a package full of all kinds of propaganda and learn to be a full-fledged animal activist. They will sell your child a club starter kit for \$22.00 and then give activity suggestions like their "Fight Fur" program.

Here they encourage kids to make flyers and hand them out in front of businesses to protest against shoppers buying fur. HSUS will also give your child cards to distribute at such events. They'll show your child pictures of dead animals in traps and direct them to other sites where they can see pictures of hunters beating seals over the head.

They will also promote vegan/vegetarian lifestyles to your child. Just go to the message board for kids and you can read how many of the kids are distressed, after reading the material HSUS SOLD them, because their parents will not let them go vegan. You will also see posts promoting PETA!

Now I want to be fair here. They do have some decent material that is age appropriate and educational in nature. I think it's overpriced; for instance, your child can rent a video to show their class for \$25.00, but some of it is good material. However, there is little promoting appropriate training, grooming or responsible ownership of companion animals. It seems to me the whole focus is turning our children into activists, vegans and extremists.

Now if I want my child to be a vegan, or an activist, I will make that decision and not HSUS. Our kids have enough on their plate without having to be weighed down with this information or agenda. Additionally, kids are kids and don't always make appropriate decisions. When dealing with complex issues like activism and protesting, it would be easy for them to get into trouble or hurt. Doesn't PETA target children too?

Ethical Financial Practices

Let's get back to the money: Former President John Hoyt once instructed his members on becoming more humane: "We begin, I suggest, by living more simply, more sparingly." Let's see how he did. He made around \$200,000.00 in the late 1980's running HSUS. In 1986, HSUS bought his house in Maryland for \$310,000 and allowed him and his family to live there, free of rent, until 1992. When he retired as CEO, HSUS gave him a \$1,000,000.00 bonus. Paul Irwin, another former President, while making \$300,000.00 from HSUS, was given an \$85,000.00 interest free loan to renovate his cabin in Maine. The cabin was held in trust by HSUS; however his family continued to use it until he died. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Makes me wonder.

Guilty by Association

Let's look at some of HSUS' associations: In April of 2000 HSUS sent J.P. Goodwin as its emissary on an anti-fur mission to China. Goodwin is not just any animal rights zealot; he was an avowed member of Animal Liberation Front (ALF), a group once called one of the biggest domestic terrorist organizations by the FBI. He had been convicted for vandalism of several fur retailers and their property. Less than a year later, he was formerly identified as a HSUS legislative staff member.

If you don't know about ALF you should check them out. They truly scare the heck out of me. They are, in my opinion, every bit as much a threat to people as Al Queda. I cannot believe HSUS would hire such a person. When asked questions about an arson fire at a slaughter house in Petaluma, California, and a Utah feed co-op that nearly killed a family, Goodwin stated, "We're ecstatic!"

Then, there is the PETA connection ...

HSUS has repeatedly hired PETA employees in their organization. Their head of investigations, several investigators, a computer programmer, just to name a few. Sorry folks, my opinion is: once a terrorist, always a terrorist. When HSUS hires these people, they appear to support the crimes these individuals may have been involved in.

In 2003, HSUS VP Martin Stephens was asked to recommend three people to serve on an EPA "pollution prevention and toxics" panel. Two of his three choices were PETA employees.

All Talk and No Action

While HSUS will admit they don't run or fund any shelters, you usually find it at the bottom of the page or tucked away somewhere near the end of a statement. As I mentioned before, they don't put their money where their mouth is. Get this ...

In 1995, when the Washington DC animal shelter was going to have to close due to a budget shortfall, HSUS (based in DC) offered to build and operate a DC shelter at its own expense to serve as a national model. There were, of course, conditions.

HSUS wanted the city to give it 3-5 acres of land and tax exempt status for all of its real estate holdings in the District of Columbia. (Remember, they buy some executives homes to live in among other property holdings.) The DC government offered a long-term lease but HSUS refused to proceed unless it would "own absolutely" the land. The district declined, and the only HSUS funded animal shelter never materialized.

HSUS, who makes and has enough money to fund a shelter in every state, as well as subsidize spay/neuter programs, declined to help the dogs in its own back yard. Why? Money is all I can think of. Perhaps they were afraid they would soil their Armani suits by actually working with a dog.

The New CEO

Rather than go on a tirade about the new President and CEO of HSUS, I have put some quotes from him below. Read them, and you decide.

"I think they wanted the aggressive approach," he says. "They wanted someone who was going to think things up. And they got him." June 2004, Washington Post when asked about his selection as CEO.

"We have no problem with the extinction of domestic animals. They are creations of human selective breeding." Quoted in Animal People, May, 1993

Overview

I could go on for days about HSUS, but I will stop here. In my opinion, they are little more than an organization whose main agenda is filling the coffers and pushing an extremist agenda through misinformation and exploitation. Again, my opinion, they have done nothing but profit from the contributions of people who don't know any better. I have tried to see it otherwise, I simply can't.

I highly recommend you go to activistcash.com and see what they have there about HSUS and their connection with PETA. There are several other sites I found interesting, as well as many stories about HSUS in the archive of the Washington Post.

Would I give anything to the Humane Society of the United States? Yes I would. A pooper-scooper, they can use to go clean my yard. At least then we would know they actually have done something for a dog this year.

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